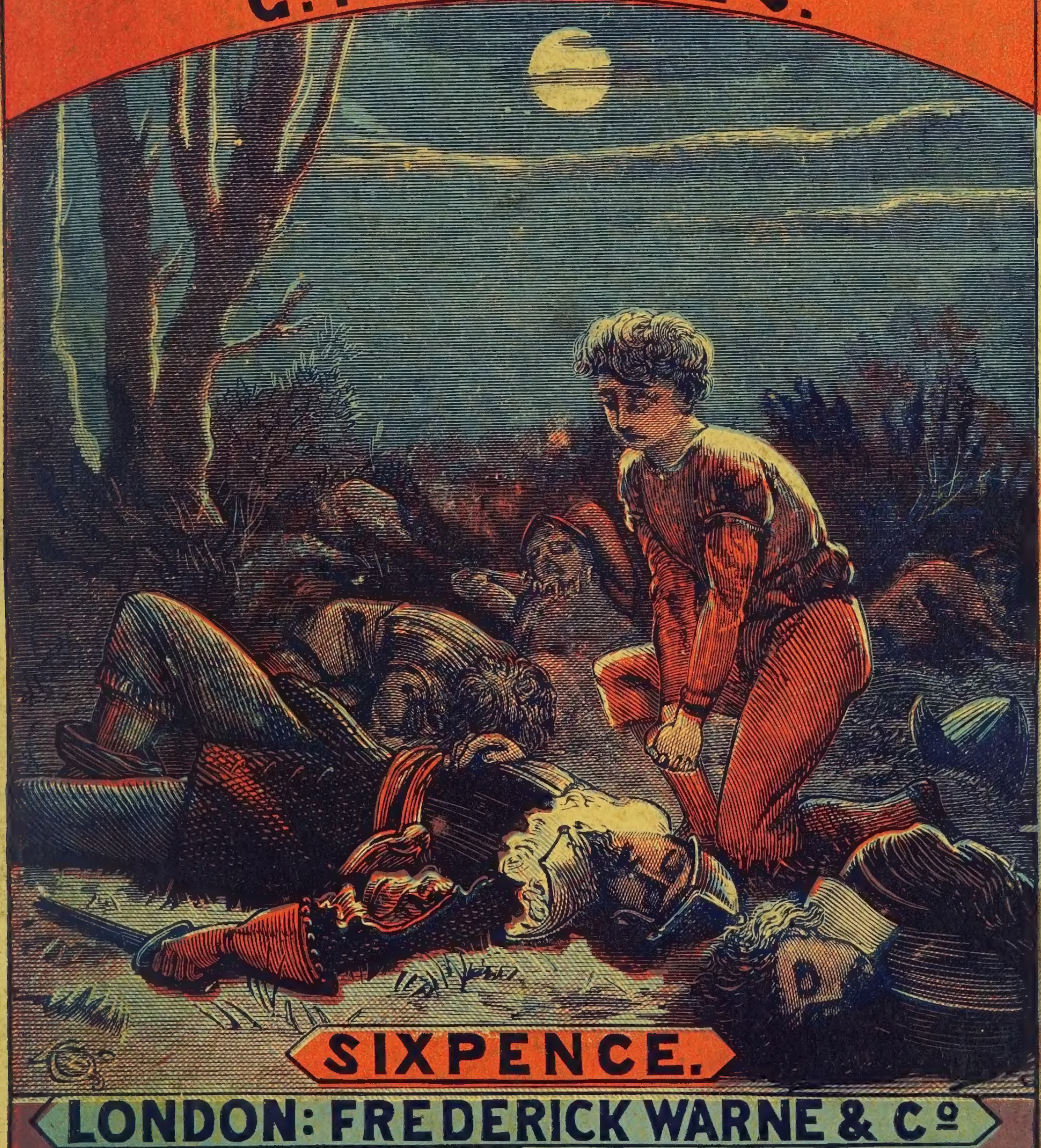
NOTABLE NOVELS.

JOHN MARSTON HALL.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES.



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THE

LIFE AND ADVENTURES

OF

JOHN MARSTON HALL.

BY G. P. R. JAMES,

AUTHOR OF "HENRY MASTERTON," "MARY OF BURGUNDY," ETC.

LONDON:
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THE
ADVENTURES OF JOHN MARSTON HALL.

My father was a gentleman of small estate in Lincolnshire, whose family possessions, under a race of generous ancestors, had dwindled from splendid lordships to bare competence. His blood, which was derived from as noble a source as that of any in the land, had come down to him pure through a number of knights and nobles, who, though they were little scrupulous as to the means of spending their riches, were very careful not to augment them by cultivating any but the somewhat barren field of war. He made a love match with a daughter of the second Lord Wilmerton; and, in order that his wife might not draw unpleasant comparisons between the station of her husband and that of her father, he frequented the court, and lived beyond his means. He was already in difficulties when I was born; but, like a brave man, he resolved to meet them boldly, and, after some solicitation, obtained a small military appointment, which increased his revenue without adding to his expenses. Loyalty with him was a passion, which, like love in other men, prevented him from seeing any faults in its object; and, of course, as the court well knew that no benefits could make him more loyal than he already was, it showered its favours upon persons whose affection was to be gained, leaving him to struggle on without further notice.

My mother I hardly remember, though my memory is very good; but as her death took place before I was three years of age, her cares of my infancy were never extended even to my boyhood.

Left thus to conduct my education alone, my father, I firmly believe, would have suffered nothing to remain undone which could have contributed to render me a learned man, had not the civil war broken out, and all the royalists hastened to the support of the King. Amongst the first of the volunteers who flocked to the royal standard, when it was raised at Nottingham, was Captain Hall; and having been sent to Worcester with Prince Rupert, he showed himself the foremost in those acts of daring courage which turned the contest between Colonel Sandys and the Prince in favour of the Cavaliers. In every skirmish and in every battle which took place throughout the course of the great rebellion my father had his share. The natural desire of stimulus and excitement, which was originally strong in his character, grew gradually into a habit, and from a habit became a passion. The tidings of an approaching conflict would, at any time, have induced him to ride as far and fast as other men would go for more pacific pastimes; and the commanders of the royal armies perceived a want in their ranks when, on looking along the line, they could not discover the face of Captain John Hall.

During the first year of the civil war I was left at home, under the charge of my nurse, and of the events of that period I, of course, remember but little. But shortly after the taking of Birmingham, by Prince Rupert, a party of Gettes's brigade were quartered at our house for three days, swept the whole estate of every thing that it produced, carried off all that could tempt their rapacity, and, on their departure, set fire to the house, as that of a notorious malignant.

My father's home had by this time become the tented field. Houseless and nearly penniless, the nurse carried me away in search of my only surviving parent, whose regiment was quartered at a few miles distance; and being a woman who loved quiet, and hated to see houses burned over head, she resigned her charge of me as soon as she had conscientiously placed me in the hands of my natural protector. But the addition of a child of four years old to his camp equipage was not by any means desirable in my father's eyes; and for some time he talked of placing me with a relation here, or a friend there, where I might remain in security. Two or three months, however, fled without this plan being executed. We had often during that time to change our quarters: passed through more than one adventure: were involved in more than one severe struggle, and encountered as many hardships as a longer campaign could have inflicted. My father found that I bore up stoutly against them all, that I was not so great an encumbrance, in moments of danger and haste, as he had expected; and that in those lapses of inaction which will break in upon a soldier's life I afforded him amusement and occupation of the tenderest and most engaging kind. Thus I soon became necessary to his comfort and his happiness; and though he would often talk still of having me placed in some situation where I could be properly instructed in arts and sciences, and learned lore, it became evident to every one who saw us together that he would never part with me so long as he could keep me with him. To make up for the want of other knowledge, however, he himself began, from my very earliest years, to teach me every thing that might render me successful in that way of life which he himself had so ardently embraced. My hands, almost in infancy, were accustomed to the sword, the dag, and the petronel; and I remember, ere I was six years old, being permitted, as a high favour, to apply the match to the touchhole of a culverin that commanded a road by which the Roundheads were advancing.

Many, too, were the dangers through which I passed in safety. Often in times of surprise and confusion have I sat upon the peak of my father's saddle, while he cut his way through the enemy; and often have I stood as a mere child amidst the charging squadrons and the bristling pikes of a general field of battle. Strife and bloodshed became so familiar to my mind that I could hardly conceive another state of things; and when any occasional pause took place in the dreadful struggle that then desolated our native land, I used to wonder at the space of time such idleness was suffered to continue, and to long for the moment of activity and exertion. It was with joy and satisfaction that my father beheld this disposition in his son, and he strove by every means in his power to promote its growth, and to direct the efforts that it prompted. He taught me to be quick and decisive, as well as bold and fearless: he bade me always think, in the first place, what was best to be done, and how it might best be executed; and then to perform what my reason had suggested without either fear or hesitation. Always keeping his view fixed upon the ultimate advantage of the cause he had espoused, he zealously instructed me to remark and remember every part of the country through which we passed in our wandering life, and the person of every one who was brought into temporary connection with us in the changing fortunes of those adventurous times.

Besides teaching me to ride and to shoot, and to perform all other military exercises, he did not fail to give me what little education of a milder kind circumstances permitted, during the short lapses of tranquillity which occasionally intervened. He was himself, however, obliged to be my preceptor; for he was not only prevented from engaging any other person in that capacity by our continual changes from place to place, but he was also rendered unable to do so by his pecuniary circumstances, which had by this time been reduced to the lowest ebb. Our own property had been sequestrated: the King had no money to bestow; and, although Captain Hall sometimes enjoyed a moment of temporary prosperity, after squeezing some rich parliamentarian, or capturing some inimical town, his whole property more usually consisted in his horse, his sword, and his son. I acquired, it is true, in a desultory manner, some knowledge of history, geography, and arithmetic; but this, together with a smattering of Latin, and the capability of writing and reading, was all that I could boast of by the time I was ten years old.

Our moments of quiet, indeed, were always of very short duration; and, during all my early remembrances, I scarcely can recollect having passed six weeks without seeing blood flow in civil strife.

It must not be thought, however, that our state was melancholy or painful. To those who thought as little of human life as the persons did by whom I was generally surrounded, this kind of existence was gay and happy enough. When they saw a comrade sent to his long home, or a friend fall dead by their side, a minute's mourning and a vow to revenge him was all that the sight excited; and many a cheerful bowl and a gay jest would circulate in the evening amongst the Cavaliers who had lost, in the morning, the dearest acquaintances and oldest companions.

Habit is a wonderful thing; and it would be difficult to make other people comprehend how little emotion bloodshed or massacre produces in the minds of men accustomed to be daily spectators of such scenes. It is not at all surprising then, that a boy born, as it were, and brought up in the midst of them, should feel their awful nature less than others, and should enter with more pleasure into the adventurous excitement which they certainly afford. Such, at all events, was the case with myself; and, although I have learned, from after events, to believe that my heart was neither naturally hard nor cruel, yet it is scarcely possible to describe the joy and enthusiasm I experienced on the approach of strife or battle, the triumph that I felt at the overthrow or death of any remarkable foe, or the careless disregard with which I viewed the slaughter of my countrymen, and the fall even of those I personally knew. This military zeal was known and remarked by all my father's comrades; and the amusement and gratification which they derived from my early passion for that course of life to which they had given themselves up at a more mature age, caused me to be a general favourite with every old soldier in the ranks of the royalists, so that each one vied with the other in exciting me more and more upon the very track which I was already too eager to pursue. Amongst the Cavaliers I was generally known by the name of "Little Ball-o'-Fire," and I soon learned to be proud of that appellation, and vexed when I was addressed by any other. In times of prosperity I was loaded with presents and caresses; and in moments of defeat and danger there was still some one to think of and to protect Little Ball-o'-Fire, the soldier's son. Nor were these good deeds entirely without requital on my part; for shrewd, active, and fearless, I was often enabled to assist the defeated or pursued Cavalier, to mislead the Parliamentarian by false information, or to gain intelligence of the enemy's movements, and to guide my friends either to security or victory.

Amongst all the comrades and connections of my father, Goring, afterwards Lord Norwich, was the foremost in his affections; and with him also I was an infinite favourite, although there were several others to whom I was personally more attached. I remember, however, many instances of great favour received from him; and, as difficulties multiplied round the royal cause, and as dangers threatened more and more imminently the head of our sovereign, it was to the exertions and friendship of Lord Goring that we were, more than once, indebted for our existence. With him we served in many a campaign in Kent and Sussex: with him have I aided my father to empty many a flagon when the fight was over; and with him have we lain in concealment for weeks together, when our paths were surrounded by enemies against whom our force was too weak to contend.

At length, when I was little more than ten years old, and a momentary gleam of success brightened the cause of the Cavaliers, my father and Lord Goring unfortunately separated; and with a small but well-appointed troop we hastened across the country with the intention of joining the royal army, which was then marching towards Cornwall. At Bolton-le-Moors, however, while we were marching gaily along, without the slightest idea that there was an enemy in our neighbourhood, we were suddenly surprised by a party of the parliamentarian forces; and, after a rapid but desperate struggle, every man of my father's troop was put to death. He himself fell amongst the last, brought from his horse to the ground by a ball through the neck. I was at the distance of about fifty yards from him, and hastened up to give him aid; but just as I was running forward, I saw one of the pikemen stoop over him, and, while my father held up his hand, in the vain endeavour to ward off the blow, the man drove his weapon through him, and pinned him to the ground. I had a large horse-pistol in my hand, which was instantly directed to the pikeman's head; and, had I but had time to discharge it, he would, most assuredly, have lain beside the gallant officer he had just killed. But, at that moment, one of his comrades struck me across the head, with the staff of his pike, crying, "So much for thee, young viper!" and brought me, stunned and powerless, to the ground.

Fortunate it was for me that the blow, without being sufficiently violent to bereave me of life, had been severe enough to deprive me of all sense or motion, for I was thus passed over as dead, and I found afterwards that no one had been taken to mercy by the victors. It was evening when we began a fight, which, in duration, did not last ten minutes; but when I woke from the sort of sleep into which I had fallen, I found the moon shining bright upon the Moors, with my father and five-and-twenty gallant soldiers lying dead around me. In truth, this was the first event that ever made me think of death, even for a moment, as of a thing to be feared, or regard strife as the great destroyer of all dear affections and kindred ties. The sight was horrible enough, to see the bodies of such a number of brave and noble-hearted men now cold, inanimate, and most of them stripped of every thing valuable, lying dead in the pale moonlight, with their faces bearing all the various expressions which the human countenance can assume under different modes of violent death; but it was the sight of my father's corpse which brought it home to my own heart.

When I had recovered my senses completely —which was not for several minutes after consciousness began to return—I crept onward to the spot where my father had fallen, which was not above ten paces from that on which I had been lying; and as I gazed on his still, silent face, and thought of all the affection towards myself which I had seen it bear so often, I could not help feeling that death is indeed a horrible thing. I looked at it long, till the moon began to go down, and I knew not well what to do. I had no means of burying the body, and yet there was a feeling in my bosom, not to be defined, which would not let me leave the corpse of my father uninterred for the ravens to make it their prey, or the dogs to mangle it.

Near the spot, however, there was a little copse, with some tall trees rising out of the brushwood; and, after many a painful thought, thither I retreated for shelter. As I knew not who might visit the field from the town, and as I had heard that the people of the neighbourhood were rank Roundheads, I thought it best to climb one of the oaks; and there I watched till the dawn of morning. Hardly was the sky grey with the first light when I saw six or seven people coming over the downs with spades and shovels, and I soon found that their purpose was to bury the dead. By them that office was performed decently enough on the spot itself; and in about three or four hours it was all over, leaving no trace of the skirmish, but the turf beaten up by the horses' feet and he and there dyed with gore, and the long lo mound of fresh earth which covered the trench containing the dead bodies. I found, by the conversation of the men employed, that this act of charity had been performed by order of some persons in the little town who had witnessed the affair; and who, partly moved by a sense of decency, and partly with a view to salubrity, had caused the corpses to be thus covered over with earth.

I was now, like many another, alone in all the earth; without friends, or home, or resource; without money, or protection, or expectation; but perhaps I was better fitted for such circumstances than any one who was ever yet cast an orphan upon the world. I was accustomed to rely upon myself alone; to take every event as I found it; and I had been so long in the habit of seeing the sunshine and the shade, the defeat and the triumph, the disaster and the success, succeed each other like April clouds and beams, that though my heart was full of mourning for my father, yet I confidently anticipated that the next cast of the die in fortune's hand would reverse my fate, and bring me back to prosperity again.

I was mistaken, however. A long series of sufferings ensued; and they were sufferings of a nature that I had never encountered before. I had often, indeed, undergone privation, and known poverty. I had often been more than one day without tasting food, and had slept for many a night together on the bare ground; but all these inconveniences were part of the soldier's fate, matters which, however unpleasant at the time, were laughed at and forgotten as soon as they were over. Now, however, I had to endure poverty without one alleviating circumstance, or one consoling reflection.

All that I had on earth, at the moment my father was slain, consisted of two crown pieces, which had been given me by Lord Goring when we parted; but when I came to seek for them, after recovering my senses, I found that they had not escaped the researches of the plunderers who had stripped the dead around me. My clothes, indeed, probably being of little value either in point of size or quality, had been left me; and these, with a pistol and a dagger, which I found upon the ground, constituted my whole property, when at length I left the earth that contained the body of my unfortunate parent, and went forth again into the world.

It would be difficult to give any detailed account of the life I now led. I wandered over almost every part of England, seeking a precarious subsistence by every means that my habits and education permitted. Often I fell in with old comrades of my father; and then I was sure of protection and assistance as long as they had the means of affording it. Often I joined myself to a troop of Cavaliers, and for a few days lived the life to which I had been accustomed in former years. But the power of the Parliament was daily increasing, that of the King daily going down; and, one by one, every force to which I joined myself was dispersed, and I was again obliged to seek my way alone. I never, however, yielded for one moment to despair; and at times,—when I have shared in the stores provided by nature for the birds in the air, when my sole food has been haws and whortleberries, roots and acorns,—I have hummed to myself

"There's a better time coming!"

and gone on with a light heart to seek a richer meal for the next day.

Although to plunder or to kill a Roundhead, in any way that chance happened to present, was in my mind, at that time, neither sin nor shame, yet I cannot remember ever having done what I should even now consider an evil act on my own account. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that, when a wounded or a fugitive companion wanted food or other necessaries, and could not obtain them for himself, I have often ventured beyond any code of morality that I know of, and have gone down to spoil the Philistines with indescribable glee.

Well known to every leader in the royal cause, and almost to every soldier, I was often employed as a guide, and still more frequently as a messenger. In the latter capacity, indeed, I was generally successful, even where others would probably have failed; and when Langdale rose in Wales he intrusted his design to me, for the purpose of having it clearly communicated to Musgrave in the north, and to the Cavaliers in Kent. I received no written document, indeed, although my youth and my knowledge of the country enabled me, in general, to pass unmolested: but Langdale knew that he could trust to my never-failing memory to repeat every word as he had spoken it; and was also aware that the other royalists would trust to my report.

This commission I executed with ease and safety, as far as my journey to the north went; but in making my way towards Kent, I encountered more difficulties and some dangers. The small stock of money with which I had been furnished failed me before the object was accomplished; and at Reading I was recognised by a Puritan whom I had once, about six months before, tripped up into a river, while I ran off with a fat baked pig, which he was carrying out of the town from the baker's oven. Of the pig my share had been small, having performed the feat in favour of three old comrades who were lying concealed in the neighbouring fields, and were half dying of hunger: but, in the present case, the Roundhead made no nice distinctions; and as soon as he set eyes upon me, caught me by the throat, conveyed me to the town prison, notwithstanding my most vigorous resistance, and left me in the hands of a goaler, whose tokens of affection remained upon my skin for several weeks afterwards. Not at all admiring my fare or treatment in the prison, and having also acquired a strong distaste to remaining long in any one place, the very first opportunity afforded by open doors I made my escape,—not unpursued, it is true; but that mattered little; for at that time it was only necessary to give me the free use of my limbs, and a start of ten paces, and the man would have been swift and strong indeed that could have overtaken me.

Several other adventures also befell me: but at length I made my way into Kent; and here, to my unspeakable joy, I found myself amongst a royalist population, and saw in every part of the county preparations for a great effort in favour of the King. I heard, in every quarter, too, that Lord Goring was to take the command of the forces; and, sure of receiving protection and assistance, I made my way forward to join him, with a feeling in my heart that a change was about to come over my fate. I was half starved by this time, and was all in rags; but many a better Cavalier than myself was in the same state, and I did not fear that my father's old friend would deny me.

Before I could reach the army, however, the royalist force had advanced towards London, and were again in retreat; and when I arrived in Maidstone, I found the Cavaliers pouring in, and learned that the enemy were following fast upon their steps. During the whole of that evening I could not find Lord Goring, (who, by the way, had, before this, become Earl of Norwich,) but I met with many an old acquaintance amongst the officers, and every kindness was shown to the son of Captain Hall. As an attack was expected early the next morning, the troops were under arms before dawn; and as the Earl was riding along the line, I ran up to the side of his horse, and spoke to him. For a moment, in the rags that now covered me, he did not recognise his friend's child, and replied sharply, "Get along, boy! get along! I cannot speak to thee now!"

It was the first rebuff I had ever received from a Cavalier, and I thought that my heart would have broke; but I still clung to his stirrup, and said, "What, my Lord, have you forgot Little Ball-o'-Fire?" At that name he drew in his rein short, gazed upon my face for a moment, and then stooping down over his saddle bow, he caught me in his arms, and lifted me quite up to his bosom. "Forget thee! no, my boy! no!" he cried; "and now I have found thee again, thou shalt never quit me, for thy good father's sake."

There was little time given for further conversation. The enemy had been more on the alert than we expected, and were, by this time, rapidly advancing, and the shot of their artillery began to tell upon our line. Every one has heard of the gallant defence of Maidstone: but it soon became clear that we could not maintain the position in which we were first attacked; and Lord Goring, who had laid out his plan the night before, ordered a slow and firm retreat to the ground he had fixed upon, at the back of the town. Before he left the green, however, he beckoned me up and gave me a scrap of paper, on which he had written something hastily. "Get thee behind that house, Ball-o'-Fire," he said, "and wait there till you see a young gentleman come up with a troop of Cavaliers. Ask if he be Colonel Masterton: give him that paper, and then guide him down by the back of the town to the hollow way, by which the enemy must advance: take him to any point he can best cut his way through, and bring him to me, on the edge of yon hill."

I did as I was bid; and Lord Goring himself remained for about ten minutes longer with the Kentish horse, keeping the green firmly against the enemy, while the other regiments filed off, and took up their position on the slope beyond. At length, he too retreated; and I hid myself while the enemy passed over the same ground. Scarcely was the green clear, when up at the full gallop came a young gentleman, seemingly scarcely twenty, with as gallant a regiment of horse as ever I saw. He halted his men before "The Bush" alehouse, and then rode on a few yards to see what was passing in the hollow way and on the slope.

His countenance was a pleasant one, at least to me, with a broad open brow, and quick fine eyes; and although I saw by the manner in which he looked at some dead and wounded soldiers who were scattered here and there, that he was not so habituated to scenes of death and conflict as myself, yet I could not help thinking that he must be the Colonel Masterton to whom I was ordered to address myself. I watched him for a minute, as his keen rapid glance ran over the confused spectacle that was passing beyond the town; and as I saw him turn his horse, and ride back towards his men, I ran up and spoke to him. At first he did not distinctly hear what I said, but he bent down his head towards me with a good-humoured smile, and I again repeated the words, "Colonel Masterton."

"Well, my little man," he replied, with a look of surprise, "what is it?"

I saw at once, from his tone and his look, that I was right, and I gave him the billet from Lord Norwich. He read it attentively; and then asked, "Can you lead me by some by-path to the left of the enemy's line?" I answered that I could; and, without more ado, set off before him, and conducted him by the back streets to a point where a line road led out into the country.

The moment that his eye gained a clear sight of the enemy, I observed it mark every part of their position, rest fixed on one particular spot for an instant longer than any where else; and I saw that God had made him a soldier. His plan was evidently formed; his orders were short, clear, and accurate; and drawing out his regiment from the town, he charged a large body of cavalry, who, together with some pieces of artillery, lay upon the extreme left of the enemy's line, and in a moment drove them to the devil.

I ran on as hard as I could to see what was going forward, and, just as I came up, I found the Roundhead horse forced back into the lines of the pikemen; and one of the first faces that I beheld, amongst the Parliamentarian foot, was that of the man who had killed my father. I never forget faces, and his I was not likely to forget. The fellow was pike in hand, in front of the young Cavalier; and I had just time to mark him so as not to be mistaken, when Colonel Masterton's horse passed the pike, and at one blow of the rider's sword the Roundhead went down never to rise again.

The battle was like all other battles; but by one means or another I contrived to keep near Colonel Masterton's regiment through the whole affair, till just when they were in some difficulty I offered to guide them up the lime road to Lord Goring, if one of the men would take me behind him on his horse. The young gentleman seemed surprised to find me so near him; and after another charge upon a body of the London troopers we made our way forward, and reached the brow of the hill where the Commander-in-chief then stood.

The event of that day every one knows. The enemy were repulsed at all points, but it could hardly be considered as a battle won, for we were ultimately obliged to retreat. After a long, severe march, we halted for the night, and I remained quartered with Colonel Masterton and his regiment, and was treated with the greatest kindness both by officers and men. It was soon found that the army, being chiefly composed of raw and ill-disciplined troops, could not be held together; and the same night Colonel Masterton was ordered to lead his regiment towards the right of the enemy's line of advance, and, if possible, to effect a diversion, while Lord Goring, with whatever veteran troops could be collected, endeavoured to cross the country, and throw himself into Colchester. After having attacked an outpost against which he was particularly directed, the young officer was ordered to disband a foot regiment which was joined to his cavalry force; and then—making the best of his way back to Devonshire, whence he had come—to disperse his men, and keep quiet till better times. As his family, from particular circumstances, although attached to the royal cause, had not called upon themselves the indignation of the Parliament, in near so high a degree as it had been excited against Lord Goring, that nobleman, on giving me to Colonel Masterton, as a guide, made him promise that he would always protect and never abandon me; and well did he keep his word.

CHAPTERS II., III., IV., V., VI.*

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CHAPTER VII.

When all these affairs were settled, and my young Lord Masterton and fair lady were looking as pleased as heart could wish, going about with each other from morning till night, and seeming perfectly contented in every respect, the house began to grow tedious enough; for though, perhaps, in the wide range of human enjoyments there is no greater pleasure than that of contributing to render other people happy, there are few things more tiresome than looking on after the work is complete. I loved Lord Masterton, it is true, as sincerely as it was possible; for dangers encountered with him, and services both rendered to him and received from him, had of course made him very dear to me. I loved Lady Emily too, just enough less dearly than I did my Lord to make my affection distant and respectful; and they both loved me, very much, from the same motives that I loved them. Nevertheless, I acknowledge again that the time hung very heavy upon my hands; and after the first week of the honeymoon, with all its bustle and its gaiety, was over, I began to long for something new.

I have no doubt that Lord Masterton, who was keen enough in perceiving other people's feelings, had no difficulty in understanding that the happiness of himself and his wife was too quiet and tranquil in its nature to be very amusing to other people; and knowing perfectly that I was of a disposition to which activity, either mental or corporeal, was absolutely necessary, he took no small pains, as soon as he could think of anything besides his bride, to give me full occupation, in supplying what he called the defects in my education. I was taught French thoroughly, which, to say truth, has been of great use to me; but, at the same time, I was filled with a great deal more Latin than I ever knew what to do with; and an attempt was made to cram me with Greek, which I resisted with all the repugnance of a child for an emetic. Still Lord Masterton, thinking himself bound to act the part of an elder brother to the orphan boy he had taken under his protection, persevered in the attempt, and several other branches of science were added to my daily routine of instruction; but I need hardly tell the reader, that this sort of occupation was the least palatable that it is possible to conceive in the estimation of a boy brought up as I had been.

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* The above chapters are omitted by the editor of this work, inasmuch as every fact contained in them is to be found much more fully detailed in the "Memoirs of Henry Masterton, Lord Masterton;" and it may be only necessary to add, for the information of such persons as are unfortunate enough not to have read that work, that Lord Masterton was accompanied through all the adventures therein described by John Marston Hall, the writer of the present book. Farther, it may not be impertinent to observe, that, as Lord Masterton himself states, the subject of the present memoirs was of infinite service and assistance to his noble friend in the difficulties and dangers which he had to encounter; and we have every reason to believe, that had it not been for the promptitude and assistance of "Little Ball-o'-Fire," as he is generally called in that work, the history of the noble Lord would not have been brought to so happy a conclusion. In the chapters here omitted, the writer details all the scenes that took place in England, and all those that followed in France, up to the period when his Lord Masterton was happily wedded to the Lady Emily Langleigh, and took up his abode with her father at the beautiful little chateau of St. Maur. At that point we shall again commence the adventures of John Marston Hall, as written by himself, and proceed, even to their conclusion, with no other alteration whatever, than a slight modification of the orthography, which does not particularly well suit the fashion of the present day, and the occasional translation of various passages originally written in the French tongue.

I believe, and, indeed, am sure, that my good young Lord saw how distasteful the whole was to me; for I have often remarked, when he casually entered my place of study, that a slight smile would play upon his lip, as he noticed any of the fretful and impatient movements with which I accompanied my lessons. He persevered for nearly nine months, however, thinking it absolutely necessary, I imagine, both to give me such instructions, and to tame, in some degree, my wild and restless spirit. For my part I was too grateful for all that he had done for me, too sensible of the kindness of his motives, and too well aware of the superiority of his mind, to complain aloud of anything that he might think beneficial for me to do. Repine, I did, in secret, and that most heartily; but nevertheless, as I was quick and active in mind as well as body, and applied myself diligently to learn while I was about it, I probably gained more in the same space of time than many other people would have done. At length, one day, to my surprise, my usual masters did not appear from Paris, and I received directions from my Lord to prepare to accompany him on a long ride.

This was all very pleasant to me, especially as it seemed to augur something new; and no language that ever yet I heard is adequate to describe the sort of thirst for some novelty—some change in my situation—which then consumed me. Gladly did I get myself ready, gladly did I mount my horse; and, riding forward with Lord Masterton alone, while the grooms remained at a good distance behind, I gave way to all the wild gladness of my heart.

Lord Masterton suffered the first burst of joy to have its full course, and smiled as he remarked it; but in a few minutes he assumed a more serious tone, saying, "Come, come, Little Ball-o'-Fire, let us ride on calmly, and converse like rational people, for I have something serious to say to you."

In a moment I was all attention, and he proceeded :—

"I was in hopes," he said, "to have kept you with me yet for several years—till such time, indeed, as young men usually set forth in the world; and even then only to have parted with you in order to have placed you in some station where you might win honour, and make your way to fame. For such a purpose, however, it was necessary that all those points which circumstances had caused your father to neglect in your education should be supplied here, and I consequently have endeavoured to obtain for you every sort of instruction which this country can afford."

"Indeed, my Lord," I cried, as he paused for a moment, "I am not of the wood of which men make a scholar, and I am afraid, if my getting on in the world is ever to depend upon my learning, that I shall drop by the wayside from pure weariness."

"I have come to the same conclusion too," he answered, in a tone which expressed some degree of mortification, but not a touch of anger,—"I have come to the same conclusion too; for you must not suppose that I have been blind to your impatience. I had hoped, indeed, that it would wear away, though Lord Langleigh assured me that it would not; but now having given you the trial, having added something to your stock of knowledge, and having found that your distaste to study increased rather than diminished, I have determined to abandon the attempt, and to let you follow out that way of life for which nature seems to have formed you, and in which fortune herself had placed you."

Never did such joyful words ring in my ears before; and had we not been on horseback I should have thrown myself at his feet to pour forth the gratitude that swelled in my heart. Words, however, were not wanting; and although I never made use of more than served my purpose, yet I contrived to make him understand how very happy he had made me.

"Well, well," he replied, "all I can wish is to advance your interests; but you are of course aware, that such a change of prospects implies that you must leave me."

Although I had thought the matter over a thousand times, and pictured to myself all I should like to do, yet I had certainly never contemplated the necessity of quitting a friend and protector that I loved, as a part of the scheme; and when he placed it thus plainly before me the tears rose in my eyes.

"Such, nevertheless, must be the case," he continued; "for, of course, to pass your time in idleness here would be as disagreeable to you as to pass it in dry study."

"But cannot you go to the wars," I cried, "and let me go with you?" Lord Masterton smiled.—"I am afraid," he replied, "that I cannot mingle in the scenes of civil strife that are going on here, solely to find occupation for your active spirit. No, no, my good boy, Lord Langleigh and myself agree in thinking, that foreigners, casting themselves upon the protection and hospitality of a nation like this, should take no part in the factious intrigues that agitate the country; and we have determined to remain as quiet as possible till they are all over, which we both hope and believe will be the case ere many years be past; for the most turbulent cannot long remain blind to the dreadful evils which such a state of distrust, uncertainty, and apprehension inflicts upon every class in the community. But to return to our subject: it becomes us now to think of how we can place you to the best advantage. You are too young, of course, to serve in any of the regiments at present in activity, and if we place you as page to any one else, it must solely be with a view to your military promotion hereafter. A gentleman who was here the other day, with our good friend Monsieur de Vitray, was pleased with your history, and expressed a desire for just such a boy as you, to bring up in his own steps, which have ever been foremost in the field of battle."

"Who, who was that?" I cried eagerly. "I saw them all. Was it the dark man with the heavy hanging brow? I do not like him."

"No, no," he answered, "It was Monsieur de Villardin, who sat at table on Lord Langleigh's left, with dark hair, just mingled with grey, and a scar across his forehead."

"I like him," I replied, "I like him!" and Lord Masterton went on.—"Well," he said, "he luckily liked you and your character; and after a long consultation with myself upon the subject, and the fullest consideration of your interests and your happiness, Lord Langleigh is now gone to speak with Monsieur de Villardin on your account, and to see whether he is willing to receive you in the capacity which we wish you to fill. Although the usages of this country would render it in no degree degrading for the son of the first nobleman in the land to become the page of the Duc de Villardin, yet we wish you, as it were, in quitting me, to gain a step in life. Lord Langleigh, therefore, will tell him that if he will receive you as superior to his common pages, and promise to obtain for you a commission in the service of the state, when you reach the usual age, we are willing to place you under his care. At the same time, to enable you always to maintain the station which we wish you to take, we have determined to grant you a pension of a thousand crowns per annum, chargeable upon a farm of Lord Langleigh's in Normandy. You will thus be independent of any one, for the deed of gift shall be drawn out, giving you that revenue irrevocably."

The confused whril of joyful ideas that took place in my brain at these tidings would be difficult to express. The idea of seeing the *world*, and mingling in scenes of warlike activity once more, was all joy; and if there had been any thing which could have given me a moment's uneasiness in the prospect of going forth again into that world alone, it was the chance of being reduced to the state of poverty and destitution which I had suffered for one whole year. I do not mean to say that I did fear it, for I was not of a character to fear any of earth's evils, or even to take them into consideration in my lookings forward towards the future; but the memory of some pains and some degradations which I had suffered did certainly cross my mind for a single moment, though without any power to affect my hopes or purposes By the liberality, however, of my kind protectors, all such apprehensions were entirely removed. I had now always a resource, and that resource greater in amount than the pecuniary means of many a nobleman's son. Sorry I am to say, that for the time these joyful feelings, and all the gay dreams to which they gave rise, very nearly wiped away the grief I had felt at the prospect of quitting Lord Masterton; and although I was deeply grateful, and expressed my gratitude for the new proofs of his generous kindness which he had just given me, I could not help, as we rode home, raving upon all the bright anticipations which I entertained in regard to the future.

He smiled at my delight; and though perhaps another man might have been offended at the little regret I expressed at leaving him, he had himself known what the spirit of adventure was too well not to make full allowance for the passionate desire of novelty that I felt, and for the restless love of change which habit had, in my case, rendered second nature.

To hear the success of Lord Langleigh's mission was now my thirst. But he did not return for several hours, and I was obliged to bridle my impatience the best way I could. When he did appear, however, his countenance, which was a very expressive one, showed me at once that he was well pleased with the event of his errand. Nevertheless, he said nothing to me on the subject; and as Lord Masterton was out of the way, I was still compelled to digest my curiosity till the next morning. Before breakfast, however, I observed them in close conference for some time; and Lord Langleigh, whose custom it was never to talk upon any subject of importance sitting still, called me to him as he rose from the breakfast-table, and in a walk through the park informed me, with his usual prompt but somewhat sparkling manner, that the Duc de Villardin had very willingly agreed to all that he proposed.

"You are not to think," he added, "from his readiness to take you, urchin,"—the name by which he always called me,—"that you are any great acquisition, after all. Nevertheless, you are a good, quick-handed boy; and if you go on as you have begun, you are in a fair way to get yourself hanged, shot, or made a field-marshal of. My son-in-law tells me, what indeed I very well knew without his telling, that your heart is all on fire for activity and new scenes. Now, with Monsieur de Villardin, it is probable that you will have as much as you could well desire; for he is one of those men who let no moment fly by them unmarked by some deed or some event. He is in the midst of all the Parisian factions too; and, if one half of the rumours of the day be true, they will soon bring down Spanish cunning to aid French intrigue, and make a mess of it fit for the palate of the devil himself. So now you will be in your right element, urchin, and I will only give you one piece of advice before you go. Never let your zeal for any one's service make you act ill, even to his greatest enemy."

I felt myself turn as red as fire, for, to say the truth, the good old lord had touched upon a tender point; and, though I was young enough to think of such matters lightly, yet, during the nine months which I had lately passed in a much more contemplative manner than pleased me, a suspicion would now and then come across my mind, that one or two things in my past life might as well have been left undone. Lord Langleigh observed me colour, and adding, with a nod, "It is worth your thinking of," he left me and returned to the house. I did think of his advice long and eagerly; and his words sunk down into my heart, producing therein the first of many changes which I shall yet have to notice in my principles and conduct, as in passing through life, I every now and then gained a lesson or an admonition, which taught me my own weakness, or restrained my wild passions. It was in vain, I soon felt, to look back and regret the past; but from that moment I formed my determination for the future, and tried never to forget, that no cause could ever justify an evil action.

All after arrangements were soon concluded. My dress was already more splendid than was at all necessary. My purse was well furnished by the liberality of my kind benefactors; and a pass having been procured for me to enter Paris, I took leave of the family at St. Maur three days after the conversation I have just detailed, and was delivered over into the hands of Monsieur de Villardin himself by the chief *écuyer* of Lord Langleigh, who accompanied me into Paris.

My new Lord received me very graciously, and promised me great things if I attached myself to him as zealously as I had done to Lord Masterton. His countenance, I have already said, had pleased me from the first; and it certainly was one well calculated to command both respect and regard. Nevertheless, as I came to know him better, I remarked occasionally two expressions which I had not at first observed, but which were strongly indicative of his real character, or, rather, of his faults. The first was a quick, sharp, enquiring, perhaps fierce expression when any thing was said in an under tone by the persons around him. This, however, passed away in a minute; but the second, which consisted in a tremendous gathering together of the brows when any one seriously offended him, would last for some hours, and it was evidently with difficulty that he could reassume his usual gay and cheerful manner through the whole of the rest of the day.

I had early learned to watch people's countenances as the weather-glasses of their minds, and thence to judge, not only of what was passing within at the moment, but also of their habitual feelings and inherent disposition. This had been taught me by my father, who had established his criterions for judging by long experience; and I had not seen the fierce, sharp look, and the deep, heavy scowl, upon the face of the Duke more than twice, when I established it in my own mind, as a fact beyond doubt, that he was both suspicious and revengeful. At the same time I discovered, by other circumstances, that he was highly sensitive to ridicule; and that, knowing well to how many jests he would expose himself if he suffered his irritable jealousy to appear, he laboured strenuously to cover it by the same light and witty manner of treating everything, which in that day was universally affected by all Frenchmen. In this he was not particularly successful; for, though his mind was quick and brilliant enough, his heart was too full of deep and powerful feelings to harmonise well with that playful badinage which alone affects the surface.

So much for my new master; but there are other members of his family which yet remain to be noticed. The first of these, of course, is Madame la Duchesse, to whom he led me immediately after I had been presented to himself, and introduced me as his new page, of whom she had heard so much. She was a very lovely woman, and at heart a most amiable one; considerably younger than her husband, perhaps about four-and-twenty years of age; and though, I believe, it would be doing Diana herself no injustice to compare her to Madame de Villardin in point of chastity, yet at the time I was first presented to her, ere sorrow or domestic discomfort had tamed the light heart and banished the vanities of youth, she had decidedly that love of admiration which has often, in this world, done more harm to a woman's character, than half-a-dozen *faux pas.* It mattered not with whom she was in company—rank, station, age, made no difference—admired she was determined to be by every one who came within the sphere of her influence: a thousand little airs would she assume to excite attention; and bright and sparkling was the triumph which lighted up her eyes when she had succeeded in captivating or attracting. In the case of myself even, a boy of twelve years old, she could not resist the desire of displaying the same graces which she spread out before others; and when her husband brought me forward to her, the smile that played around her lips, the flash that glistened from her fine eyes, and the elegant attitude with which she held me by the arm, and gazed for a moment in my face, were all a little more than natural, and very, very different from the calm, sweet manners of the beautiful Emily Langleigh.

Besides herself, I found in the saloon where she was sitting her only child, a fine lively girl of little more than six years old, who afterwards became my frequent playfellow.

Having introduced me to his lady, and told her several particulars of my history, adding no small commendations thereunto on my own behaviour, the Duke summoned his major-domo, to whose hands he consigned me, bidding him make me familiar with the house, and all that it contained. The old man, who had been in the family of De Villardin from infancy, took me by the hand kindly enough, and led me away to his own apartment, which consisted of two small, neat chambers, on the lower story, looking out into the court. Excellent old Jerome Laborde, for such was the name of the major-domo, took care, as we went along, to give me many a consolatory assurance of my being well taken care of, and rendered very happy, in the mansion of his master, conceiving me to be one of those young and inexperienced boys who are generally preferred to the place of page in a nobleman's house at a tender age, and who, commencing with timidity and innocence, generally end in impudence and intrigue. His compassion was also moved towards me from the misfortune, as he thought it, of my being an Englishman. But by this time I had learned to speak French almost as fluently as my native tongue; and, before I had been half an hour with the old major-domo, I had convinced him thoroughly that I was a person to make myself very much at home any where, and in any circumstances. His ideas of a page, however, did not permit him to imagine that, as I had not the bashful fears of the earlier stages of pagehood, I could have anything better in my character than the pert sauciness of its latter epoch; and, having conceived this bad opinion of me, the good old man very soon civilly told me, that he would lead me to the pages' room, where I would find three others, as gay and bold as myself. But before I proceed to this new theatre on which my young abilities were destined to display themselves, let me add that, ere many days had passed, I found means to convince worthy Jerome Laborde that the circumstances of my former life had rendered me a very different creature from any he had yet met with in all his long experience of pages. The injustice that he found he had done me, added to the favourable impression he afterwards received, gained me a place in his good will, which I did not lose till his death.

A scene, however, was yet to take place which was to signalise my entrance into the house of Monsieur de Villardin, and to place me, by my own exertions, in that station in his family which Lord Langleigh had previously stipulated that I should enjoy. On entering the pages' room, as it was called, I found, indeed, three boys as gay and bold as myself, full of saucy conceit and pert jocularity. They were all older than I was, and one seemed little less than fifteen years of age. No sooner was I left there by the major-domo than, of course, I became the subject of their raillery, and for some time submitted to afford them matter for amusement. Their first employment was, naturally, the examination of my dress, which I could see, by a frequent shrug of the shoulders, and the words *mauvais goût*, did not particularly please these juvenile *petit-maîtres*. Going from that, however, to other matters, they carried their jocularity so far, that I soon found it would be necessary to exert one or two of the qualities which I had acquired in a harder school than any to which they had ever been subjected, in order to put them in that place which I intended them to occupy during the rest of my stay in the family. I consequently took advantage of the first insolent word spoken by the eldest—who appeared to have a right prescriptive to tyrannise—and, having drubbed him more heartily than ever he was drubbed before, I proceeded to reduce the two others to a complete state of discipline and subordination.

It may easily be supposed that all this was not effected without considerable noise; for though we were all small enough to have lain quiet in any house, my three companions were very vociferous. Just as I was putting what may be called the finishing stroke to the affair, by once more knocking down the eldest, who, on finding that his two fellow-pages, notwithstanding all they had suffered from him in former times, were now willing to espouse his cause against the new comer, had roused himself again to the combat—I perceived that the door of the apartment was ajar, and that the face of Monsieur de Villardin (with two or three *écuyers* behind) was gazing in upon the conflict. This discovery, however, did not prevent my giving full force to my blow, and my antagonist measured his length upon the floor at his master's feet.

"Very well struck for a *coup d'essai*," cried the Duke, walking in; "every fresh dog must of course fight his way through the pack;

but now, young gentlemen, as your new comrade seems to have satisfied you pretty well that his must be the first station amongst you by right of superior strength and activity, I also tell you that it is his by my will. Gaspard," he continued, turning to his eldest page, "you are but a boy, and not fit to cope with one who has slain men. So submit with a good grace, and give him your hand."

The boy, who had by this time risen from the floor, obeyed; but, as he did so, he eyed me from under his bent brows with a look that was sufficient warning that I had gained an enemy. This was an acquisition not particularly disagreeable to me; for, to tell the truth, I had at that time been so much more accustomed to deal with enemies than friends, that I hardly felt in my element without them; and, indeed, as I looked upon man's natural position to be a state of warfare, I was always prepared to bear my share in it with good will. These opinions, it is true, changed greatly afterwards; but how the alteration was brought about is to be found in the history of my after life.

The mortification of Gaspard de Belleville, which was the name of my chief opponent, was rendered complete by the Duke selecting me as the companion of his ride to the *palais*, where the parliament was then sitting. But I must speak of the events which occurred to me in Paris by themselves; nor, indeed, should I have mentioned the childish squabble which took place between me and the other pages, had it not been necessary to explain the origin of a good solid hatred which Gaspard de Belleville conceived towards me, and which lasted, undiminished, through life, rendering his own days miserable, and having quite sufficient effect upon my fate to show me that we should never make an enemy when we can make a friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE city of Paris, and the country in general, were then in a pitiable state, owing to every party in the land combining, in the strongest degree that it is possible to imagine, the qualities of knave and fool. The parliament was playing the fool in Paris, and yet sacrificing the country to the nicest calculations of its own interest. The party of the Duke of Bouillon was playing the fool, and letting slip every opportunity of effecting its own objects, while it was calling a foreign power into the heart of its native country to obtain them. The people were playing the fool in suffering themselves to be led by an ass, the Duke de Beaufort, and by a knave, the Cardinal de Retz, while, at the same time, they took care to enrich themselves by the plunder of the stores and magazines; and last, not least, the court was playing the fool at St. Germain, treating weakly where it might have acted vigorously, and yet cheating all the other parties with the most consummate art.

The situation of France at the time I entered Paris was, in a few words, as follows:—Louis XIV. was then a mere boy, under the regency of his mother, who, in turn, was under the government of Cardinal Mazarin; and these three personages, together with the Prince of Condé, and a large body of nobility, were then at St. Germain-en-laye, shut out of the city of Paris, which they were besieging without a sufficient body of troops to take even one of the gates. The parliament which had begun the war, and the people who had seconded it, remained in the capital, hating Mazarin, and laughing at the court; but heartily sick of a war which prevented the butter and cream from the country reaching Paris in safety; while a party of clever men and immense rogues, consisting of a number of general officers, with the Dukes of Bouillon, Elbeuf, Beaufort, the Prince de Conti, and the Archbishop de Retz, laboured night and day to keep both people and parliament in a state of agitation and excitement, in order that each of these worthy and notable leaders might wring from the weakness of a regency every sort of gift, honour, and emolument. For this purpose, open war had been declared against the court, while, as usual, the King's name was used, and the King's standard displayed on both sides. All the people in the realm seemed mad, and a strange spirit of contradicting their own established characters appeared to have seized upon every one. Acknowledged cowards led armies and rushed into battle, the most faithful turned traitors, the most honest became knaves, the firm were in a continual state of vacillation, the wise showed themselves fools, and the brave ran away. However, as it became evident to the Parisian generals that the parliament was inclined to separate from the people, and make peace with the court for itself, before the concessions were granted which they, the generals, demanded for themselves, they determined to do their best, by means of the people within the city and of armies without, to compel the parliament to be honest to them and dishonest to the court. Negotiations were immediately opened with the Spanish government of the Low Countries, Spanish ambassadors were received in Paris, the Archduke began his march into France, Turenne himself, with the common madness of the day, raised the standard of rebellion against his king in aid of his brother the Duke of Bouillon, and the Duc de Longueville promised to advance also with his forces from Rouen to support the Parisians in their struggle.

Such was the situation of things externally when I entered the capital, and became attached to one of the party of general officers. At the same time, it is to be remarked, that deputies from the parliament were treating for peace at Ruel; and though the date of their powers had expired, they were still continuing their negotiations. A report even was current that they had concluded a treaty with Mazarin; and as I had passed through the town on my way to the house of Monsieur de Villardin, I had found the people collected in large bodies, shouting "Down with Mazarin! down with the parliament!"

By the time that we issued forth into the streets to take our way to the building where the great judicial body was assembled, the rumour had become still more general, and the crowds, of course, were increased. Nothing was heard but cries and shouts, and what were then called Mazarinades. Poniards, muskets, pikes, and swords, were in all hands; and so very indiscriminate was the use which the people seemed inclined to make of their weapons, that it was only by constantly joining in their shout of "Down with Mazarin" that we made our way through them in safety. The numbers in the neighbourhood of the *palais* were still more immense and vociferous; and even the crowd of guards who were keeping the court and the doors of the building seemed not a whit less infuriated than the people. At the same time persons were seen continually coming out from the parliament, and haranguing the multitude; and those also who went in seldom failed to treat them to a taste of their eloquence ere they entered the gates. The state of insanity to which all this oratory raised the populace may easily be imagined; and at one time I heard a man exclaim from amongst the crowd, that they should hang the deputies over the gates; while one of the town-guard added, that if Monsieur de Villardin, who was just going in, would return and point out to them who were really the *Mazarins* in the parliament itself, they would drag them out, and poniard them in the court.

Upon this, the Duke, of course, favoured them with an oration also, and a curious piece of composition it was; consisting of a series of pleasantries upon the parliament, upon Mazarin, upon himself, upon the court, and upon everything, mingled with a few apophthegms upon policy, religion, and morals, which all tended to captivate the people, and make them think him wondrous wise, without tending in the least to calm them, or reduce them to order and decency. Now Monsieur de Villardin was not only a polished speaker, and, where his own passions were not concerned, a close reasoner, but he was also really a patriotic, generous, disinterested man; and the fact of his speaking for half an hour, as he did on the present occasion, a tissue of high-sounding, disjointed nonsense, which could only serve to inflame still further the minds of a mad and excited populace, can only be accounted for upon the grounds of the general insanity which seemed at that time to have seized upon all ranks and classes.

This oration being finished, we entered the Parliament House; and, by the special favour of one of the door-keepers, my new lord was permitted to take me with him into the interior of the building, perhaps anticipating one of those scenes in which the prompt hand and ready perception, that had been my principal recommendation in his eyes, might be serviceable to him in more ways than one. We took our way by the great staircase in the right wing, and soon found ourselves in what is called the *Salle de pas perdus*, which was full of people of all sorts and descriptions; guards, door-keepers, and officers of the *palais;* counsellors, statesmen, members of the different chambers, and the mixed crowd of attendants belonging to all those who were thronging to the parliament on the present momentous occasion. Passing onward, through the small refreshment rooms called *Les Buvettes*, where no obstacle was presented to my following my master, we were soon in the midst of the hall in which the parliament were assembled; and such a scene of disgraceful confusion has seldom perhaps been witnessed. Half-a-dozen people were upon their feet haranguing at once; and several minutes elapsed before any thing could be heard except a confused gabble of tongues, which might have done honour to the top of the tower of Babel.

At length, the Duke d'Elbeuf, whom I had seen before, and who seemed to have the longest breath, the loudest voice, and the most determined pertinacity of the party, obtained the ascendancy; and one by one sitting down, he was left speaking alone.

"Now, Sir President," he continued, turning to a man of dignified appearance, who, habited as a high law officer, occupied one of the principal places of the assembly,—"Now, Sir President, since I can make myself heard, I demand distinctly whether you or any of your fellow deputies have, at your conference with Mazarin and the court, made any provision whatever for the security and remuneration of the generals and other officers who have sacrificed so much in the cause of the parliament and the people."

"Before I reply to any particular questions," answered the President, "I will, with the permission of the parliament, read the *procès verbal* of our proceedings at the conference at Ruel. Then having seen what we have really done, the chambers will be enabled to judge whether they can approve of the treaty of peace we have concluded."

"You had no power, you had no power," shouted forty or fifty voices at once,—"you had no power to conclude any thing! Your authority expired four or five days ago! There is no peace; we will have no peace! The deputies have gone beyond their powers; they have abandoned disgracefully our generals and our friends!"

In vain the Chief President attempted to read the paper which he had in his hand. Every time he opened his mouth his words were drowned in murmurs and reproaches; and, even when he abandoned the endeavour and sat down, it was clear that the rest of the assembly only waited for some new word to break forth again into tumult and invective. All solemnity, all dignity, was laid aside: the turbulence had not even the impressiveness derived from being terrible: it was simply ridiculous; and the only image presented to the mind by the whole scene was a body of fishwomen scolding in a market.

After the silence of perhaps a minute which ensued, a little pale young man, who seemed to me slightly deformed, and who I afterwards found was the Prince de Conti, rose near the head of the hall, and said, in a mild and sweet-toned voice, that he did wonder that the deputies from the parliament had thought fit to conclude a peace with the court, without consulting himself and the generals of the army. Another person, who was afterwards addressed as the Duke de Bouillon, with a broad, unmeaning countenance, which, however, lighted up in an extraordinary manner when he began to speak, followed the Prince de Conti in addressing the parliament:—

"Gentlemen," he said, "since you have thought fit to conclude a peace with the court, and allowed the Cardinal Mazarin, whose enmity I have so highly provoked in your service, to remain prime minister, the only favour and reward that I shall require of you is, to obtain me a passport, as speedily as possible, to quit the country with my family."

"We have not concluded a peace; we disavow it. The deputies have no power," cried a dozen voices at once; and every body again began speaking together, as if the sense of hearing had suddenly left the whole assembly. One man, the Duke de Beaufort, who was handsome enough, indeed, but whose good looks were principally composed of high health and stupidity, laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword, and declared that it should never draw blood for Mazarin. Another protested that the parliament had rendered itself for ever unworthy of the confidence of the people; and, what between reproaches and tumult, more than an hour passed without any thing being concluded.

In the midst of all this uproar, however, a piece of buffoonery, performed by the well-known Bachaumont, restored some sort of good humour to the assembly; for, seizing a momentary pause, when every tongue, as if by common consent, halted to take breath, he passed behind the famous De Retz, then archbishop-coadjutor of Paris, snatched forth a poniard, which he had espied lying concealed in the bosom of that factious prelate, and, holding it up to the eyes of the parliament, exclaimed, "Gentlemen, gentlemen, look at the breviary of our archbishop!"

A roar of laughter succeeded which left the whole of that grave assembly so much out of countenance, that it was some time before they could speak of any serious business, much more return to the angry disputation in which they had been interrupted.

Taking advantage of the change, one of the lawyers, called the President de Coigneux, rose, and made the most sensible proposition which had yet been heard; namely, that, as the deputies had acted without authority, and as the responsibility of what they had done, of course, rested upon themselves, they should be sent back with the treaty they had framed, and, though permitted to take it for the basis of a new one, should be directed, in addition, to stipulate for immunity and recompense to the generals and nobles who had engaged in the cause of the parliament.

He had not yet concluded his harangue, however, when a tremendous noise in the court below, and even in the hall without, together with loud shouts of "Down with Mazarin! Down with the parliament! Hang up the deputies! Long live the noble generals! Let us have a republic! Set fire to the *palais!*" and other such sweet and delectable exhortations, roared by the stentorian voices of the crowd, caused the orator to turn very pale, and to sit down before he had finished his oration. Another lawyer rose to second the proposal of the first; but by this time the noise had become so tremendous that what he said could not be distinguished; and the moment after the great door of the hall opened, and one of the doorkeepers entered, pale and trembling, announcing, in a voice scarcely articulate with fear, that the populace had forced their way into the *Salle des pas perdus*, and demanded to speak with the Duc de Beaufort.

That prince—who, with scarcely common sense to carry him through the world, was the great popular leader both at that time, and for many years afterwards—went out and tranquillised the people for a few minutes; but scarcely had he again entered the hall when the tumult recommenced, and it was found absolutely necessary to break up the sitting.

Nevertheless, the Chief President—although against himself personally, as the principal member of the deputation which had signed the peace, the anger of the multitude was most fiercely excited—still maintained his place with calm dignity; and declared, without the slightest shade of fear detracting from his perfect self-possession, that a proposition being before the parliament, it could not separate without coming to some decision on the subject. The motion that the deputies should be sent back was immediately put; and was carried with somewhat timid rapidity.

The next question was, how to get the obnoxious deputies to their houses with their lives, especially the Chief President, who notwithstanding political differences, was admired and esteemed by every nobler spirit present.

He had just taken the voices of the assembly, as calmly as he would have done at any ordinary time, and on any ordinary occasion; and, for a moment after, there followed a general pause, while the whole assembly looked upon him with a feeling of interest and apprehension that is difficult to describe. Even I, myself, who had never seen him before, and now, as I stood behind, under one of the arches, only caught an occasional view of him through the crowd, felt that I would have shed my own blood to save him. Every body present was well aware that there existed a thousand chances to one that he would be massacred the moment he showed his face amongst the infuriated mob without; but he himself did not seem to feel that he was an object of any particular attention, or to suppose that there was any imminent danger, though he must have been internally convinced that his life was not certain for a moment. Calmly rising, however, after he had declared the vote of the chambers, and had pronounced the sitting at an end, he prepared to leave the hall without any apparent agitation. As he took the first step towards the door, the Duke de Bouillon and several other officers, amongst whom my new lord was one, pressed about him, and entreated him to pass round by the writing-rooms at the back of the building, by which means he would avoid encountering the people.

"Gentlemen," he replied, "the court of parliament never conceals itself; and if I were certain of being torn in pieces the moment I set my foot beyond this hall, I would not commit such an act of cowardice as to go out by any way but the way to which I am accustomed."

"At least," cried the Archbishop, "do not attempt to proceed till I have endeavoured to calm the people."

A bitter smile curled the lip of the President, who well knew that prelate to be the instigator of half the sedition which took place in the city; but he replied, with a low bow, "Well, well, my very good Lord, go and give them the word, by all means;" and almost as soon as De Retz had left him, he again began moving towards the door. Several of the more popular amongst the officers surrounded him as he advanced, in order to protect him; and Monsieur de Villardin, placing himself on his right hand, bade me go on immediately before, and do what I thought best to assist in clearing the way.

"You seem to have great confidence in your page, Monsieur le Duc," said the President, in a calm, easy tone.

"You will see whether I have not cause, sir," replied the Duke; "but let me beseech you not to utter one word, either good or bad, till you are safe in your own dwelling."

It is a certain fact, that to teach people that we expect great things from them is the best of all ways to cause them to use great exertions; and the words that I overheard at once made me determine to leave nothing undone that could show my zeal or activity. The rest of the popular nobles and lawyers now approached to protect the other deputies, and thus we advanced to the door. When we were close to it, the *huissier* threw it open, and a sight certainly somewhat appalling presented itself. The outer hall was filled to suffocation with a dense mass of ill-favoured vagabonds, who presented themselves, with fury in their eyes and weapons in their hands, shouting all sorts of imprecations upon the deputies, upon Mazarin, and upon the court. They were led by a ruined advocate called Du Boisle, who was almost as ragged as his followers, and equally well furnished with arms. Indeed, the combination of swords, guns, and daggers, with rags and tatters, had a very strange effect to the eye when it first lighted upon the multitude, which presented the aspect of a strong force of armed beggars.

However, we moved on directly towards the opposite door; and as all looks were turned upon the parliament, none upon me, I advanced, keeping a step before the President, till I almost touched the front rank man, in the centre of the crowd. He showed not the slightest disposition to move out of the way; and, although I kept my hand upon my dagger, I thought it might be as well to try mild means first; and, therefore, setting my heel upon his toes, I gave them a gentle squeeze, which made him start back, roaring, upon those behind him. The tumult was still so great, that the cry of pain he uttered passed almost unnoticed, while his rush back made those behind him retreat also, so that a passage was cleared for us half way through the hall. We lost no time in taking advantage of this favourable circumstance; but, before we had proceeded far, Du Boisle threw himself in the way of the President, and addressed him in language which at once showed why his oratory was so much more successful in a mob than in a court of justice. As his harangue was rather lengthy, and a crowd, like damp hay, always heats itself by standing close packed together, I soon saw brandishing of weapons, and caught a sight of two or three men mounting upon the benches at the back, and calmly taking aim, with their muskets, at various persons in our little party. It therefore seemed necessary to bring the advocate's oration to a conclusion; and as he was so near the President as sometimes to take him by the robe, I easily got in behind him, and catching his coat, so as to throw him over amongst the people, I tripped up his heels, in the very fury of his declamation. My size, of course, greatly contributed to my success, and also shielded me from notice and retribution; and in the confusion which followed, the President and his companions pushed forward, and descended the great staircase in safety.

The crowd without were not prepared for our issuing forth without any notice from their friends within, and thus we got a considerable start of them, which enabled us to convey the President to his house unhurt. Our movements, however, were soon perceived: the multitude followed, shouting imprecations upon us; and as we endeavoured to disperse, after having accomplished our purpose, a thousand scenes of confusion and brutality ensued. What became of the other nobles and counsellors, I did not see. Monsieur de Villardin turned again towards the *palais* to find his grooms and his horses; but as he had made himself one of the most conspicuous in defending the President, he was surrounded and attacked by a party of butchers, who threw him down upon the pavement. I was three steps behind: one of his assailants knelt over him with a poniard in his hand, shouting, "Death to the Mazarin!" and as long practice in cutting throats seemed to have rendered him expert and quick, it is probable that ere I could have come up to afford any assistance Monsieur de Villardin would have lost his life, on the very first day of my attendance upon him. At that moment, however, a young cavalier of not more than four or five and twenty years of age, followed by two or three servants, dashed in amongst the butchers, received in his own arm the blow of the dagger which was intended for the Duke's throat, and cleared the space round him.

At the same time, though he was sharply wounded, he exclaimed, with the utmost good humour, "What! gentlemen, are you going to kill your friends? This is no Mazarin! This is one of the generals. Do you not remember Monsieur de Villardin?" It is astonishing how few words will convince a mob of anything under the sun. The butchers looked utterly confounded when they heard that they had just been engaged in the laudable employment of assaulting one of the generals of their own armies, though they were told so by a person of whom they apparently knew as little. It was quite sufficient for them that someone said so; and a few more words from the Duke himself, who had by this time regained his feet, finished the impression, and sent them away to assault somebody else with as much reason.

As soon as we were left alone, the Duke turned to his deliverer, and expressed his gratitude for the service he had received. "It would be a shame to me," he added, after his first thanks had been poured forth, "if I were to remain one moment longer ignorant of the name of one to whom I am so deeply indebted."

"I can well believe that you have forgot me," answered the young gentleman, "for you have not seen me for seven or eight years; which at my time of life effects a great change; but you cannot have forgotten the name of Charles de Mesnil, your nearest neighbour, I believe, in Britany."

"Good Heaven, my dear Count, is it possible?" exclaimed Monsieur de Villardin: "I had, indeed, forgot you; but you were merely a boy when I last saw you. You are changed indeed. I never thought to see you such a height. You are taller by full two inches than your father was. Gracious Heaven! but you are bleeding," he added, remarking the wound in his arm.

"Oh, it is a mere nothing," answered the other; "I will seek some surgeon and have it dressed."

"Nowhere but in my house," replied Monsieur de Vallardin: "call up my horses. Are those yours standing yonder, Count?"

The reply was in the affirmative; and the young cavalier added, that seeing Monsieur de Villardin coming out of the *palais*, he had followed on foot to claim acquaintance with him.

I was not long in finding the grooms; and the two gentlemen having mounted, we rode home, after having spent a morning as full of bustle as even I could wish.

A surgeon was instantly sent for; and the young cavalier's wound having been dressed, he was presented by Monsieur de Villardin to his lady as the son of an old friend and the saviour of his life. What passed further I do not know; but the day closed, and I felt myself very well contented with my situation.

CHAPTER IX.

After supping with the pages, whose meals were taken in a separate chamber, I enquired of the old major-domo, who I found was to be my oracle in the house, whether the Duke was likely to require my attendance upon him during the course of the evening; and, learning that I might absent myself in security, I told my old adviser that I should go out into the streets of Paris, and take a stroll through the city, which I had not seen since I left it with Lord Masterton many months before. The good old man gave me a great many sage and prudent cautions as to my behaviour; but, at the same time, having a billet to send to his nephew, one Jacques Marlot, a printer, who lived upon the Key of the Goldsmiths, he did not at all oppose my expedition, but, on the contrary, requested me to deliver the note as I went.

I willingly undertook the task, and sallied forth full of glad thoughts, and well disposed to be pleased with everything that a great city could present.

To tell the truth, my freedom from the irksome restraint and wearisome application which my late studies demanded, made me feel very much like a bird escaped from its cage, and I walked along through the streets of Paris far happier than if I had been lord of one half of the universe. That capital, nevertheless, was not, perhaps, one of the best schools in which a boy who, like myself, had run on far beyond his years in the race of life, could complete his education. Always the great emporium of vice and debauchery, Paris, in its present state, offers but a faint picture of its former self. The license of every kind that then existed in the city no tongue can tell nor pen can describe. Everything the most sacred had become a jest. Every moral tie was broken, without shame or care; and never did liberty of speech and action arrive at the consummation of a total demoralisation of the whole people more completely than it had done, by this time, in the French capital. It luckily happened, however, that, though doubtless I might have found plenty to initiate me into all sorts of mysteries which I had better not have known, I was too young for the sort of instruction I might otherwise have received, and my nature was too quick and vehement to take pleasure in vice without passion.

All that I found then to amuse me in the streets of Paris was the gaiety, the bustle, and the liveliness of the people, the witty ribaldry of their songs and jests, their easily excited merriment, and their extravagant grimaces. All this certainly pleased and interested me; and I met with many a sight to attract my attention and arrest my steps as I walked on to the Quai des Orfèvres. However, I at length arrived there; and, having discovered the dwelling of Jacques Marlot, I went in and delivered his uncle's note.

He was a little, gay, joyful-looking man, not in the least resembling the worthy major-domo, but with a face not unlike the busts of Socrates, if we can conceive the countenance of the philosopher covered over with a florid and somewhat wine-imbued skin, and lighted up with two sparkling small black eyes, full of unquenchable fire and malice.

At the time that I entered he was busily engaged, though in total solitude, in despatching the goodly form of a fat roasted capon, which he took care to bathe in repeated draughts from a tankard of warm wine which stood in his chimney corner. He received me with the sort of gay civility which his whole demeanour bespoke; and, opening his uncle's note, grinned merrily at the contents; observing that his relation warned him to beware of printing any thing against the court, as the parliament and the generals were all racing against each other to see which should make peace fastest.

"*Ma foi*," he added, "I will make my peace as they have made theirs, with arms in my hand;" and, setting me down a cup, he insisted on my staying to drink with him, which, after having once tasted his potations, I felt very well inclined to do. It struck me, perhaps, as a little extraordinary that a poor printer, whose trade was not at that time the most lucrative in Paris, should be able to afford rich Burgundy, and to feed upon fat capon; but I soon found that, being of a very unscrupulous nature, Master Jacques Marlot obtained large prices for printing all those defamatory libels against Mazarin, the Queen, and the whole court, which then formed the amusement and the reproach of the city. It was his rule never to enquire who the authors were, provided they paid him largely. The more unceremonious the wit and biting the satire, the more it agreed with the tastes of the printer himself; and many a noble, and, I believe I might add, many a reverend pen, poured forth its gall from under the mantle of Jacques Marlot.

My promptitude in catching his *bon mots*, my readiness in replying to them, my English accent, and my insular notions, as he called them, all seemed to please and to amuse the printer much; and after having, with a rueful glance, divided the last drop in the flagon equally between himself and me, he invited me cordially to come back and see him again in a few days at the same hour, which I did not fail to do more than once; and many a merry laugh have we had together at the follies and the vices of persons of every rank, class, and condition in the state. Indeed there was such a strange mixture of the cynic, the stoic, and the epicurean, in the whole life and conduct of Jacques Marlot, that I could not help looking upon him as a great philosopher.

Whether any one, who by chance may read these pages, will coincide in my opinion, I cannot tell; but every one shall have an opportunity of judging; for this casual acquaintance, formed under such very common-place circumstances, went on into after years, and followed me through many a strange scene to distant parts of the land. Those scenes, however, will, themselves, require too long detail for me to pause upon our less interesting interviews; though the conversation of Jacques Marlot would, at the time I speak of, have formed no bad jest-book for the Fronde; and on that very night I heard more *bon mots* and anecdotes in half an hour than had met my ear for many a day before.

On my return home, I found a neat small room, not far from the apartments of the good major-domo, prepared as my lodging; and by the time I had half undressed myself, in order to go to bed, I was surprised to see the door open, and Monsieur de Villardin himself enter the room. As his brow was somewhat grave and stern, I imagined that he had come to chide me for my absence during the evening; and I instantly began to feel a spirit of rebellion at the very thought, partly engendered by my old habits of independence, partly by the sense of having in a degree recovered it anew. To my good young lord, whom I had lately left, I had been bound by ties of affection and gratitude, which would have made me do anything to please him, and which caused me to submit to his orders or to his rebuke with patience and good-will. Such, however, was not the case in regard to Monsieur de Villardin, at least as yet; and I determined to show him that, though I was perfectly willing to give him every sort of attendance when he required it, yet that I looked upon the rest of my time as at my own disposal. I resolved to let him know also, that, though the fortunes of my family had been for some time at a low ebb, I had as gentle blood in my veins as he had; and, in short, I was prepared to be as saucy and impertinent, I doubt not, as any wild, ungovernable, and hot-headed boy could be, when, to my surprise, he began upon quite a different topic, without taking the slightest notice of my late absence.

Setting down the taper that he carried, he threw himself into a large chair that stood by the fire, and bidding me put on my vest again, as he had a good deal to say to me, he continued, "Well, my page, we have begun together, this morning, as well as I could wish, and I find that the character I have received with you does you no more than justice; I doubt not that every hour will increase my regard for you; and I shall take care that you have every opportunity of distinguishing yourself that you could desire through life."

This discourse, so different from that I had expected, was certainly very pleasing to me; but at the same time I had learned too much of the world not to understand that it was a prelude to something else, which perhaps might not be so gratifying; and, consequently, I answered with the words which mean less than any others in the world, "Your Lordship is very good."

"Nevertheless," proceeded Monsieur de Villardin, "it is but right that we should clearly understand upon what terms we are to go on together. Now," he continued, assuming a frank and easy air,—which when you see men do you may be perfectly sure that they are cheating themselves, and are trying to cheat you also,—"Now, I am not in the least a suspicious man; far from it; by nature I am quite the contrary; nevertheless, I think it but right that every master of a large household like this should be thoroughly acquainted with all that takes place in his dwelling. Of course you will have a great many opportunities of observing what passes in my family, and I must require of you to be frank and free with me on all such subjects."

I did not like the matter at all, for I understood very well what he meant; and I was sure that, although he felt some difficulty in explaining himself at first, he would not be long before he found an opportunity of doing so completely. However, I thought my usual straightforward way was the best, and I answered, "I am always frank and free, my Lord. I say what I think to everybody, and of everybody."

"So I have heard, so I have heard," said the Duke; "and I must desire that you do so, particularly towards me, remembering that I look upon a person who would see his master wronged as fully more culpable than the person who wrongs him."

"My Lord," I replied, seeing that we must come to the point at last, "I certainly never will see you wronged without endeavouring to right you; and if I cannot do it in my own person, I shall hold myself bound to tell you, in order that you may do it. I am sure your Lordship does not wish me to become a spy upon anybody, nor would it have any effect if you did; for I would not remain in the house of anyone half an hour who was to require such a thing of me."

It is wonderful how many things people will do, from the very name of which they would shrink with shame if put into plain terms; and though I am perfectly convinced that Monsieur de Villardin,—from some of those vague and visionary doubts which haunt the minds of suspicious men, the spectres of a diseased imagination,—would have liked me to watch all the events of any importance that took place in his house, and make him a full report thereof; yet he immediately testified great disgust at the very name of a spy, and replied, "Far from me be such a thought for a moment, as to propose to you, young man, anything mean or dishonourable. I know you are of gentle blood, and have served well in a noble cause; and therefore, though I hold you bound by your duty, as you are also by the promise you have just made, to give me instant information if you see anyone attempt to wrong me in any way, yet, of course, I do not desire you to become a spy upon those around you."

I saw evidently that he caught at the promise I had made, and, to tell the truth, I was sorry that I had made it. Not that I did not consider myself bound by the station I held in his family to do exactly as I had said; but I was a little afraid that my good lord might construe my words rather more liberally than I had intended them to be understood. As they were spoken, however, there was no help for it; and though I repeated over again,—to make the engagement as clear and definite as possible,—that I would never see him wronged without endeavouring to right him, or without giving him an opportunity of doing so himself, still I was afraid he might be inclined to exact, under that promise, more than I should be inclined to concede. I found indeed, afterwards, that he himself very well understood, that there was another way of making it a point of honour with me to do as he desired, which was by loading me with benefits, and bestowing on me that confidence which would have rendered it an act of the greatest ingratitude on my part to conceal from him any attempt to injure him.

Satisfied with the promise I had made, and determined with regard to the course he would pursue towards me, he dropped that part of the conversation there; but made me give him a long history of my family and my adventures; told me that he had been well acquainted with Lord Wilmerton, my mother's father, some fifteen years before; and ended by giving me an assurance, which he nobly accomplished, that thenceforth he would treat me more as his son than as his attendant. He then took up the light and quitted the chamber, leaving me to meditate over the future, which, notwithstanding the promises he had made, and which I fully believed he would keep, still presented some clouds and shadows that I certainly could have wished away.

After this conversation I was almost continually with Monsieur de Villardin, especially as, in all those exercises in which noblemen of that day held themselves bound to have their pages well instructed, I was already as skilful as necessary, and, consequently, had scarcely any other occupation than that of attending upon the Duke. In the pages' room matters soon assumed the state into which I could have wished them to fall. Master Gaspard de Belleville, the eldest of my three companions, submitted to necessity with a somewhat bad grace; and the two younger, as soon as they had become reconciled to me as their new comrade, and accustomed to my manners and accent, sought shelter under my protection from the tyranny of their former despot. The old major-domo ere long acquired a great affection for me; and as I was quite willing, from the novelty of the thing, to be petted as much as any one pleased, he made quite a favourite of me, providing me with all those little comforts and luxuries which the chief domestic of a great house has always at his disposal.

Monsieur de Villardin himself was, as Lord Langleigh had said, a man who let no moment slip past him unmarked by some event; and, with a spirit of restless activity,—not unlike what was my own at that time,—he took part in everything that was going on. By day he was either busy in the intrigues of his faction, or in the field with his troops; and even at night he was very often as busy in beating up the enemy's quarters, or in stirring up the Parisians to some new absurdity. In all his expeditions I formed one of his attendants: I had constant employment,—and both at home and abroad was as happy as I could wish.

This state of things, however, could not, of course, last for ever; and had no other circumstance occurred to interrupt its duration, the gradual recovery of Monsieur de Villardin from the madness of the Fronde would ultimately have put an end to it; but an incident soon happened, to which I shall now turn, and which eventually occasioned my departure from Paris rather faster than I approved of. The first treaty of peace which had been signed was indignantly rejected, as we have seen, by the parliament, the populace, and the generals; and the deputies were again sent back to treat at Ruel. During their conferences, as an armistice had been refused, Monsieur de Villardin and others took care to amuse Mazarin by frequent excursions, which sometimes were pushed to the gates of St. Germain. Mazarin, always timid, made concessions in proportion to his alarm; but, at the same time, as he loved not the sort of arms with which the Parisian generals fought him, he took care to combat them with weapons peculiarly his own. Three fresh armies, as I have said, were directing their course towards Paris in support of the parliament. In regard to the one promised from Normandy, the Cardinal tampered with the general, the Duke de Longueville, and delayed its march. In regard to the other, commanded by Turenne, knowing the chief to be incorruptible, Mazarin corrupted the men. The whole army was literally bought; and when its general was about to begin his advance upon the capital, he was at once abandoned by his troops. The third, consisting of Spaniards, the Cardinal well knew would not march without the others; and having thus placed himself on more equal terms with the Parisian leaders, he took advantage of the consternation which these events produced to press the treaty of peace, which was soon after concluded and ratified by all parties, but the populace, and one or two of the leaders who had too great a love of faction, in the abstract, to yield to any measure calculated to put it down. Thus, then, the war was brought to an end; but still so turbulent and disorganised was the state of Paris, that the court dared not set foot within its walls; and, while the people were committing every sort of excess, and the most scandalous libels upon Mazarin and the royal family were every day published, the parliament, in order to signalise their zeal for their new allies, the court, proceeded against the authors and printers with the most tyrannical severity.

Of course my good friend Jacques Marlot could not escape, and I one day found old Jerome Laborde, the major-domo, in great affliction on account of his nephew, who had been arrested that morning for the publication of the famous attack upon the queen, called "La Custode." It so happened that, by my master's permission, I passed the two following days at St. Maur, with Lord Masterton, who was kindness itself towards me; and on the third morning I was sent by the Duke, immediately after my return, to gain some intelligence in the Faubourg St. Germain. As I came back, I saw an immense crowd advancing rapidly towards the Place de Grève, and crying, "Honte! honte! Aux Mazarins! aux Mazarins!" Running my eye a little forward, I soon perceived that the cause of the tumult originated in the procession of the criminal lieutenant and his archers towards the place of execution, whither they were carrying some condemned criminal to make his last public appearance in the most disagreeable manner. As it was evident that the principal personage on the scene was in favour with the public, I hastened forward to obtain a glance, when, to my horror and astonishment, I beheld the jovial face of my poor acquaintance, Jacques Marlot, still as jovial as ever, notwithstanding his endeavours to assume a sober and sedate demeanour under the very grave circumstances in which he was placed.

Every sort of mad enterprise was then as common as a hedge sparrow, and some evil demon put it in my head to rescue the unhappy printer from the hands of Monsieur le Bourreau.

Amongst the mob were a great number of printers' devils, booksellers' boys, and other shopmen; and speaking a word or two to those who seemed the most zealous, our plan was quickly arranged, and spread like wild-fire amongst the people. The crowd was every minute increasing; their cries and execrations were gaining new strength at each vociferation; and I saw Grani, the criminal lieutenant, turn his head more than once to scan the aspect of the very unwelcome train which now accompanied him. He soon, however, reached the gibbet in the Place de Grève, and poor Marlot turned,—with a face out of which even his rueful situation could not banish entirely habitual fun,—to pronounce, as usual, his last oration:—"My friends, my friends," he cried, "take warning! See what comes of a Mazarinade!"

The name acted as a watchword, and the moment it was pronounced, a well-directed volley of stones was let fly at the criminal lieutenant and his archers, who were not prepared for that sort of attack. One of the men was knocked down; the rest were thrown into confusion; and, taking advantage of the moment, we pushed on and charged the panic-struck officers of justice.* Some of the guards were felled to the earth; some of them fled as fast as their legs would carry them. The criminal lieutenant was beaten severely, and glad to escape with his life; and Jacques Marlot was in an instant set at liberty, amongst the shouts and gratulations of the populace.

Feeling that I had perhaps done a foolish thing, and—from a knowledge of the delicate situation in which the Duke stood with the court—more apprehensive of the consequences to him than to myself, I made as much haste as I could to get away quietly, without even staying to congratulate the printer on his deliverance. As we had completely put the archers to flight, and had quite satisfied them with their airing in the Place de Grève for one day, no one opposed me on my way home, and I found Monsieur de Villardin in the hall, ready to go out on horseback, accompanied by the page I have mentioned under the name of Gaspard de Belleville. I had generally found it a good plan throughout my little life, whenever I had committed a fault which I was conscious might affect some other persons, to make them acquainted with it immediately, that they might be upon their guard against the consequences; and, following this rule, I at once went up to Monsieur de Villardin, and informed him that I believed I had done a very foolish thing.

"It is half repaired by acknowledging it so frankly," replied the Duke; "but what is it, my boy, that we may do the best to remedy it?"

Without further circumlocution I informed him of the facts, which seemed to startle him a good deal.

"This is unpleasant indeed," he replied, "but in truth, I cannot find in my heart to be angry with you; for I doubt not I should have done just the same: and what the master would do, he cannot well blame in the page. We will hope, however, that you have not been recognised. Nevertheless," he added in a low tone, "have what clothes you may need packed up, and be ready to set out at a minute's notice; for in these times no one can tell one moment what they may have to do the next."

I followed my lord's orders to the letter; and as soon as he had gone out, cast everything that I had that was well worth carrying, into two large saddle-bags. In this occupation I proceeded most zealously, not having the slightest inclination to act as substitute for Jacques Marlot in the elevated station which the criminal judge of the Tournelle Court had destined him to fill that very morning. The thoughts of such a consummation to my enterprises disgusted me considerably, as, of all deaths under the sun, I had the greatest objection to that of hanging; and the idea thereof occupied me so completely, that it was not till I had finished the preparation of my saddle-bags, that I bethought me how much interested the old major-domo might feel in the mutual adventures which his nephew and myself had gone through that morning. As soon as the idea crossed my mind, however, I took my way to the old man's apartments; and, as he had heard of his nephew's condemnation, but not of his deliverance, I found him in a state of great agitation and distress.

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* The Cardinal de Retz mentions in his Memoirs, that two criminals were rescued, and seems to imply that they were saved from the gallows together. Joly, whose work forms a running commentary upon that of De Retz, shows that the Cardinal spoke of Jacques Marlot, the printer, as one of these culprits, and mentions his crime,—though the punishment of death for writing, or rather for printing, a libel, may seem a little severe. It must be acknowledged, indeed, that "La Custode," a copy of which exists in the British Museum, is a most dirty and scurrilous attack upon the Queen; but still, the tyranny of the whole proceeding against this unhappy man seemed to justify the hatred which the people conceived, about this time, towards the great body of Parisian lawyers.

"Cheer up, cheer up, Monsieur Jerome Laborde," I said, as soon as I had obtained admission; "cheer up, things are not so bad as you suppose."

The old man shook his head, but I went on and told him that I had heard from certain authority that his nephew had been delivered by the hands of the people. He was at first incredulous, and although I could have given him stronger proof than mere hearsay, that what I asserted was correct, I did not think it necessary or right to make any one acquainted with the share I had borne in the rescue, except my lord and master: I added, however, so many assurances, that the old man at length began to have some faith in my statement, and went out himself to ascertain the facts. I did not see him afterwards till night; but I was very well assured that he must soon receive satisfactory confirmation of the good tidings which I had brought him.

CHAPTER X.

SHORTLY after Monsieur de Villardin's return on the day of which I have just been speaking, I received notice that I should be required to accompany him in the evening to a great supper at the house of the Duke de Bouillon. As I was beginning, at that time, from one circumstance or another, to imagine that I was in no degree uglier than my fellow mortals, to find out that good looks were prized even in a page, and that a handsome person was not shown to less advantage by appearing in becoming apparel, I took care that the finest of my wardrobe should be displayed on the present occasion, where I was sure of seeing, and in some sort mingling with, all that was bright, and noble, and beautiful, in the French capital.

Although self-conceit has made many a man very comfortable through life, I do believe that the peculiar modification of the same feeling which is generally called vanity, seldom, if ever, produces anything but disappointment. We did not arrive at the Hôtel de Bouillon till more than one half of the company had assembled; and, though the scene was certainly as splendid as youth, beauty, wealth, gaiety, good taste and grace, could render it, my pleasure was of course confined to seeing others, without attracting the slightest attention myself. Confounded with the other pages, of whom there was an immense profusion, nobody, in all probability, ever saw me except worthy Monsieur de Vitray, who recognised me instantly, and spoke a few words to me as he passed.

As is usually the case, I believe, all the visitors who appeared there, came with their own thoughts and purposes, and gave not one idea to anybody else, except as they were connected with their designs and pleasures. From the extraordinary twist, too, that everything had got in France, at that time, the general order of all things seemed inverted. The bright, and the beautiful, and the young of the other sex gave up the whole of their conversation to politics and factious intrigue; while cunning statesmen, deep lawyers, and reverend divines, old warriors, and grey-headed politicians, universally devoted themselves to making love to everybody they should not have made love to.

I came away, thinking a Parisian party very dull; and sitting in the *portière* of the Duke's coach, who carried along with him one or two of his particular friends in the body of the vehicle, I ruminated over my disappointment; too young, indeed, to investigate metaphysically the sensations which I experienced, but quite old enough to resolve that I would never again expect anyone to take notice of me, either for my fine clothes or my good looks.

When we reached home, Monsieur de Villardin's friends descended and went in with him, to pay their respects to the Duchess, who, having been slightly indisposed, had remained at home. He, of course, accompanied them into the hall, but, as he passed me, he paused a moment to say in an under voice, "Do not go to bed." There was a good deal of anxiety in his eye, and emphasis in his tone, which made me attach to his words a greater degree of importance than they seemed at first to bear. Nor was I wrong in my interpretation, for in less than half an hour the old major-domo called me out of the pages' room,—in which I had been sitting with Gaspard de Belleville, whose spirits I had remarked to be extravagantly high,—and led me by the hand to his own apartment.

When he had got me there, and shut the door, good Jerome Laborde folded me in his arms, and the tears actually rose in his eyes.

"I have bad news for you, my son," he said; "and unfortunately it happens that your kindness to my nephew is likely to prove your ruin. My lord the Duke has just been telling me that it was you who saved my poor nephew, and that the criminal lieutenant and his myrmidons have found you out."

Of course the first announcement of such a fact was not particularly agreeable to me; but, as I came hastily to reflect upon my fate, and to think that I should again be obliged to scamper off, and to do the best I could for myself in the world, there seemed something so absurd in the sort of perversity with which fate destined me to be a wanderer, that I could not help laughing, notwithstanding the difficulties of my situation.

"You laugh, my son," cried the old man in great astonishment, "but I can tell you the business is a very serious one, and that you might chance to be shut up for life in the Bastile."

"If that is the case," replied I, "the matter is serious indeed. I thought they would only have hanged me; and I have been so accustomed to risk hanging every day of my life that it was nothing new; but, as to spending my whole existence in a prison, that is a very different affair; and therefore, good Monsieur Jerome, I shall get out of the way directly, leaving you to make my excuses to my lord, for going without asking his permission."

"You are too quick, my son, you are too quick," cried the old man; "it was the Duke himself who told me but now to speak to you. Do not suppose that he intends to leave you without protection. No, no, he is a kind-hearted man, though quick and jealous in his disposition from a boy; and he bade me tell you that he would have defended you to the last for the act you have committed, even had it not been in favour of my nephew; but that as it was so, he will defend you more eagerly still. He thinks, however, that for your present safety, you had better quit Paris as soon as possible; and, as he intended to send someone to his estates in Brittany to-morrow, he will give you the commission, and order a groom to accompany you and show you the road."

"I am quite ready," replied I; "there is nothing to be done but to saddle the horses."

"Never did I see so hasty a boy," cried the old man; "how will you get out of the gates, I should like to know, when they are closed as firmly as locks and chains can make them."

"I would get over the walls," replied I, smiling.

"And the horses?" said the old man, with a smile: "no, no, my son, you must follow the plans laid down for you by my lord, who knows this country, at least, better than you do. When you have everything ready, he says, go to bed, and sleep for two or three hours: rise twenty minutes before the dawn, and you will find horses, and the packet he intends you to take, all ready prepared for you. By the time you get to the gates, they will be opened, and you will have nothing else to do but to ride on as fast as possible, till you reach my lord's castle of the Près Vallée. Remain there quietly till you hear from him, and, in a few weeks, he will have negotiated your pardon with the court."

This plan was, of course, one that both suited my wishes and provided for my safety, better than any I could have laid out for myself. It offered me the prospect, too, of new scenes and adventures of a nature somewhat less appalling than those which might lead me into a dungeon for life; and I consequently proceeded to put it into execution with every feeling of joy and gratitude. Good Jerome Laborde undertook to have me called at the appointed hour, and, accustomed from infancy to take repose at any scattered moments that offered the possibility of doing so, I lay down, and was soon asleep.

When I was called in the morning I found, much to my surprise, that Monsieur de Villardin was himself up; and, as I afterwards discovered, had risen at that early hour solely on my account; a mark of kindness and interest that touched my heart the more, because it was totally unexpected. After receiving from his own hands a packet of letters for his different farmers and receivers in Brittany, accompanied by the assurance that he would leave no means untried to procure my pardon, I took my leave, and, descending to the court-yard, found the groom who was to accompany me, holding two strong horses, on one of which already appeared the saddle-bags containing my wealth and apparel. Old Jerome Laborde was also there, ready to embrace me before I took my departure; and ere we set out, he did not forget to burden the groom with a *bissac* loaded with various Parisian delicacies, to console me on my journey.

The Duke had strictly enjoined me to avoid all towns in the neighbourhood of Paris, and to make my first day's ride the longest and the most rapid of the whole expedition; and, consequently, when once we had passed the gates, which we were permitted to do without question, we set spurs to our beasts, and never drew a rein for twenty miles. By this time, however, I began to feel in security from the pursuit of anything but hunger, which was now pressing me hard, and, after riding on a few miles further, we saw a small open wood in the neighbourhood of Epernon, into which we retired for the purpose of lightening good Jerome Laborde's *bissac* of some of its savoury contents. The groom, who, like most of Monsieur de Villardin's domestics, seemed to be a connoisseur in the good things of this life, spread forth the viands on the table-cloth afforded by the green grass at the bottom of a gentle slope in the wood, with infinite taste; and the fine *pâté* of turkey and truffles which formed the staple of the *bissac*, looked none the worse for its crust having cracked in more than one place under the jumbling of our ride, suffering the topaz-like jelly to shine forth through the apertures.

Scarcely, however, had I time to help myself to a ponderous slice, and to add thereto a portion of wild boar's face, which exceeded any Hampshire chaw I ever tasted, when I fancied that I heard a low groan quite near. The sound made me start up and look around; but as I could perceive nothing, as hunger was unruly, and as the groom, who by this time was deep in the appropriate worship of the pasty, declared he had heard nothing, I sat down again, and in one attack very nearly demolished the slice I had first assigned to myself. I then added a draught of excellent Burgundy from a flask which the *bissac* also afforded; but I now certainly began to think that our regale had made the hamadryads envious, for another distinct groan followed, evidently proceeding from a large oak tree hard by, and the moment after the body of a man appeared, cautiously descending from the higher boughs. As he swarmed down the trunk, tightly embracing its rugged circumference with his arms, which operation was rendered somewhat difficult by a certain degree of obesity in his own person, he every now and then turned his head partly over his shoulder, as if to obtain a sight of the good things before us, exclaiming, as he did so, "It is irresistible!—philosophy is in vain—I resign myself to my fate!"

The next minute his feet touched the ground, and turning round with a sort of joyous pirouette, he gave me a full view of my acquaintance, Jacques Marlot. I confess that a suspicion of the identity of this genius of the oak and the ci-devant printer had crossed my mind, as he descended the tree, from various peculiar points in his rotund conformation; but it appeared that on his part, although he had obtained a thorough perception of what we had been eating and drinking, his bird's-eye view in the tree had not enabled him to see enough of our faces to recognise my person, for his first exclamation was, as he turned round, "Gentlemen, I am an hungered; and if ye do not give me food, ye have committed a heinous sin in displaying that delicious *pâté* before me.—Ye Gods! what do I see?" he continued, as his eye lighted full upon me: "My phœnix of pages —my master Jean l'Anglais! My deliverer from a more elevated station than ever I coveted! Let me embrace thee in token of thanks for my abasement."

As the best welcome I could give the unfortunate printer, I made him partake liberally of our fare, and suffered him to cheer his heart with our flask, till half his woes were forgotten. While he went on, which was nearly till pasty disappeared and bottle sounded empty, I told him that I was now suffering on his account, and explained to him my situation. At first, his whole soul being engrossed in one occupation, he seemed to feel but little for my misadventures; but as soon as he had a moment's leisure, he looked shocked; and when he had finished, and could absolutely eat no more, he expressed, gracefully enough, both his gratitude for my services, and his grief for the inconveniences to which they had exposed me. He then told me that as soon as he was out of the hands of the archers, the day before, he had taken leave of his friendly mob of deliverers, and trusting to nothing but his own legs, had made the best of his way out of Paris.

"As soon as I was fairly beyond the gates," he added, "I set off running again, as hard as I could; and when I could run no more, I walked; and when I could walk no longer, I stood still, which was exactly on the spot where I now am. I had nothing to eat; and you there behold my beverage," he continued, pointing to a small stream that danced before us. "I christened it, however, vin blanc d'Epernon; and though it was not quite so good as the vin blanc d'Epernay, it quenched my thirst; and having dug up as many pignuts as I could find, I mounted yonder oak, with all the agility of a light diet, and soothed myself to sleep by comparing myself to Diogenes. How I should have passed over this day, I do not know; for I dared not visit my house, which, doubtless, was also pillaged long ago by the ministers of justice; and you may easily conceive that the archers of the criminal lieutenant do not suffer those who are placed under their protection to do so foolish a thing as go to the gallows with money in their pockets. However, I never despair, doubting not now, as heretofore, to make something out of whatever lot dame Fortune chooses to throw. Nor has she ever been unfavourable to those who trust to her bounty; for what can prove her kindness more strongly than sending you here for my relief and consolation?"

I complimented Maître Jacques upon his philosophy, which was much of the same quality as my own, and begged him to keep the wild boar's cheek, which had suffered less in the encounter than the pasty, as another token of fortune's favour. I found, however, that he was very desirous of accompanying us on our journey, and talked of my horse being strong enough to carry two. The groom also seconded his proposal in a way that I thought somewhat extraordinary; but, nevertheless, at the risk of appearing selfish, I put a decided negative upon it, not so much upon my own account as because I thought that it might place my lord in very unpleasant circumstances, if the criminal who had just been rescued from the gallows, and the page who had helped to rescue him, were found riding to his estates in Brittany, guided by one of his own grooms.

I represented, however, to Jacques Marlot, that in all probability the officers of justice were after us both by this time; and that, although in some cases union was security, in this instance our best hope of escape lay in separating, especially as it was more than probable that the knowledge of my being attached to Monsieur de Villardin might make the archers follow upon the very road I was pursuing.

This last argument was conclusive with the printer, and as, thanks to the bounty of Lord Masterton, I was still furnished with more money than I knew how to employ, I added thirty crowns to the breakfast I had given my acquaintance, and left him to continue his journey full of renewed hope and gratitude.

The groom who accompanied me seemed to take a greater interest in Jacques Marlot than the length of their intercourse warranted, and enquired very particularly into the route he was likely to pursue; but the printer, according to the good English proverb, was too old a bird to be taken by the chaff which my guide spread before him; and with a cunning smile evaded his questions, whispering to me as he embraced me at parting, "Beware of your guide."

Early—too early had I learned to distrust my fellow-creatures, a lesson which we have unfortunately too frequent opportunities of repeating in our course through the world ever to forget, when once the sweet confidence of innocence and inexperience, like the bloom upon ripe fruit, has been brushed away by the first touch of the polluting world. I had seen fully enough, however, to doubt the faith of my present conductor, and I resolved to watch him closely as we proceeded, not well knowing what particular line his roguery might take, but suspecting strongly that he was not the most honest of servants, nor likely to prove the most infallible of guides.

It luckily so happened that the saddle-bags containing my stores of all kinds were upon my own horse, and therefore I possessed the power of directing all our movements, as well as the right of doing so, which my station and my lord's commands conferred. Nor was it at all unpleasant, I confess, to reflect that, in the event of any dispute arising between myself and my companion, who had been directed in all respects to consider himself as my servant, I had nothing to do but ride away, and leave him to do the best for himself,—which reflection was the more especially gratifying, as I believed he might obtain a considerable reward by betraying me, and did not much doubt that he had some thoughts of the kind in his own mind.

I showed him, at least, that expedition was part of my plan; for as soon as we were once more in our saddles, I pushed forward with all speed, and accomplished nearly forty miles more before night. A considerable town lay at the distance of a few miles to our right, and thither my guide strongly recommended me to proceed, lauding to the skies the accommodation we should there meet with; but I took my own plan, and riding on till I espied a neat cabaret in a village, halted there, preferring the risk of a bad supper to the risk of an unpleasant lodging.

The next day we proceeded in the same manner, though not at the same rate; taking whatever refreshment we needed at the smallest and most retired places I could find; and though the worthy groom more than once attempted to prove restive, and to treat me as a mere boy, he found that he had to do with one who had managed shrewder men than himself. It soon became apparent that, though our horses were strong and well-seasoned to hard work, it would take us rather more than four days to reach the place of our destination; but for the last hundred miles I found my companion much more easily managed, yielding at once to my will with the best grace in the world, which conduct pleased though it did not deceive me.

Sudden changes, without an apparent cause, always afford very good reasons for suspicion; and it was clear enough that the alteration in the good groom's behaviour had not taken place from any increased reverence for myself.

"Whatever it is he intends to do," I thought, as I remarked this change in his demeanour, "the fellow has laid out his plan, and thinks it quite secure. He must have fixed, too, upon some spot for executing it towards the end of our journey, since he is so indifferent as to the way we take here. I will watch him well, however, at every mile." This resolution I kept to the letter, never suffering him to be out of my sight for a minute; but nothing suspicious occurred till the close of our fourth day's journey, when he declared that since I was so fond of hard riding, he thought we might get on to Rennes that night.

I did not exactly know how far it was to Rennes, for had I been aware that it was at the distance of twenty miles, when our horses were already nearly knocked up, I should have concluded that—calculating on my distaste to anything he proposed—he wanted me to stay where we were, and, therefore, suggested that we should proceed further. I certainly fell into the trap; and simply because he desired to go on, determined to halt at the next village.

When we reached it, the first house I espied was a neat cabaret, and drawing in my rein I sprang to the ground, announcing my determination of sleeping there. A grin of satisfaction on the groom's face was the first thing that excited suspicion in my mind that I had overreached myself; but the countenance of mine host, who now appeared, confirmed my doubts; and as he spoke to the servant as an old friend, I soon found that I had made a terrible mistake. On enquiring the distance to Rennes, too, and finding that our horses could by no means have accomplished it, I saw that the attempt had been proposed solely to make me do the contrary; and thence deducing that, at this very spot, the consummation of the groom's manœuvres was destined to take place, of course I determined to be all eyes, ears, and understanding.

The landlord's daughter, a very pretty frank-faced brunette of about twenty, attracted by my gay dress, and feeling that kindness which all women experience towards extreme youth, soon came up to me, and in a very short time we were great friends; but I could not attend to half her civil offers of the various sorts of refreshment that the house afforded, on account of my anxiety to keep watch over the groom. In this endeavour I was tolerably successful for some time, and I do not think he obtained an opportunity of exchanging one word with the landlord, till we had concluded our supper, except, indeed, such as related to the general affairs of Monsieur de Villardin, whose name was well known in that part of the country, and to the state of Paris. All this time, however, I had another subject of anxiety in my saddle-bags, which were left upstairs in the chamber assigned to me; and after I had sufficiently refreshed myself, I was tempted thither to see that all was safe, thinking that I should be down again in time to prevent much private conversation.

I was wrong; and on again entering the kitchen I found the places of both the landlord and the groom vacant, while the host's mother sat by the fire dozing, and the pretty brunette was spinning beside her with great eagerness.

As soon as ever I appeared, the latter beckoned me to her, and said in a low voice, "You are betrayed, *mon pauvre garçon;* but if you would hear how, go out at that back-door, run along at the top of the bank as quietly as you can, and make the best use of your ears."

I instantly followed her advice, and opening the door to which she pointed, soon found myself in the little court of the auberge, which again opened into what seemed the garden of a *guingette*, surrounded on three sides by walls, and on the fourth, which lay to my right hand, flanked by a high cliffy bank that sloped down towards the door at which I stood. It was night, and the moon had not yet risen, but there was still light enough remaining to let me see or rather divine all this, and running up the bank, and along the edge, with as noiseless a foot as possible, I soon heard voices speaking in the garden below me. I crept on as fast as I could, and the next moment clearly distinguished the words made use of. The groom was acting the orator as I came up, and proceeded as follows:—

"No, no, that won't do at all, Monsieur Parnac, for if he were to be taken in your house, under my guidance, most likely my good lord would turn me to the door, if he did not throw me out of the window, and would certainly ruin you here for your pains. You do not know what a man he is—so sharp, if you give him the least cause for suspicion! I do believe he finds out when one is going to do any little trick, even before one knows it oneself. I remember his turning off his chief *écuyer* for merely whispering in the street with a macquignon, who was bringing him a horse for sale. No, no, let it be managed my way. Send off some one to-night, and have the officers stationed about the watering-place, by Meri, you know. Let them take me too, seemingly, for being in his company; and so my lord's suspicions will be set at rest, and I shall be carried back to Paris too, where I shall get the reward."

"Ay but, Maître Pierre, are you quite sure of the reward?" demanded mine host.

"All I can tell thee, Parnac, is this," replied the groom. "I heard it offered by proclamation, as we were riding home, the evening before I came away. A thousand crowns were to be given to any one who would deliver up the leader of those that had rescued the criminal, and two thousand crowns to those who would deliver up the criminal himself. I would have done it myself, if I had known at the time that this boy was the person; and I could have managed it easily as we came through the city. But I never found it out, as I tell you, till we met with this Jacques Marlot, and then I heard them talk about it quite as if they were in security."

"Well, well, Pierre, I think thou wilt get thy thousand crowns," answered the landlord, "and they know how to do these things so secretly at the court, that thou mayest get them and not lose thy master's service either; but tell me, what am I to get?"

"Why, of course, I will pay thee for the man and horse sent to the city," replied the groom.

"Ay, but that will not be quite enough," answered mine host, "to pay me for risking your good lord's custom and patronage. Something more! something more! good Peter, or thou mayest ride to Rennes to-night thyself."

"Well," answered Peter, "I will tell you what, Parnac; the officers shall bring him on here, and while we halt to refresh, you and I will have the picking of those saddle-bags of his, in which there are a good thousand crowns besides. If he finds them gone and complains, it will pass for a piece of the archers' handi work, and no enquiry will be made."

"Ay, now thou speakest reason," answered his respectable friend, "and I will send off directly. At the half-way watering place thou sayest; but at what hour? We must name some hour for the officers to be there."

"Say nine o' the clock," answered the groom; "we shall not be there till eleven; but they must wait, you know, they must wait."

"Well, it shall be done without delay," replied the host, "but now, hie you in, Pierre, for you say the boy is as sharp as your master, and may suspect us. Yet stay; remember, if you fail me about the bags, I will do for you with your lord. So keep faith."

The groom replied at some length, but as their further conversation seemed likely to refer alone to their private affairs, I made the best of my way back to the house, and ere either groom or landlord returned, had gained sufficient information from my pretty brunette, in regard to the roads, to serve my purpose for the next day. I found that, at the distance of about four miles from the village, the highway was intersected by another, which led away in the very direction I wished to take. It was neglected, however, and heavy, she said, passing through some wide forest ground, which always affords a bad foundation; and since the new road had been made, she added, few people ever travelled the old one except the couriers for St. Malo, who went that way for the purpose of dropping packets, and sometimes sums of money, at various small towns through which it alone passed. It used, she said, to have a bad reputation for robbers, and about three months before, one of the royal messengers had been plundered, but since that time she had heard of no further outrage.

As she was speaking, the groom came in, and to break off a conversation I did not want him to hear, I asked him sharply where he had been so long. He replied that he had been tending his horses; and to put him completely off his guard, I ordered them to be at the door exactly at the hour on which I found he had already calculated. He promised to be punctual, and not doubting that he would be so, I soon after retired to bed. Danger of any kind never made me sleep less soundly, but I confess that, on this occasion, it was long before I could close my eyes; but it was self-reproach, not apprehension, kept me awake. I had been twice betrayed into an act of egregious folly during that one journey, and I began to think I was losing the acuteness which had been my most serviceable quality. I could have pardoned myself, perhaps, for suffering the groom to cheat me into staying where we then were; but for babbling myself or suffering Jacques Marlot to babble in the hearing of a third person, I rated myself for a good hour after I was in bed.

CHAPTER XI.

I WAS up and watchful early the next morning; for although I had now obtained as much information in regard to my worthy guide's purposes as was necessary to enable me to shape my own plans thereby, I thought it better to prevent him, as far as possible, from organising his scheme more completely with the landlord, and providing against contingencies. By seeing a bespattered horse standing in the yard, and the complacent countenances both of the groom and the landlord, I divined that their messenger had returned from Rennes, or from whatever other town they had sent to in search of officers to apprehend me, and that all their arrangements had hitherto been successful. Trusting, however, that they would find that such calculations, formed without the consent of so principal a party as myself, would be more difficult to execute than they anticipated, I took my breakfast in great tranquillity, and as soon as the horses were ready, paid my score and set out.

The groom was in great glee, which continued uninterrupted for four good miles of our morning's ride; but at length I began to see before us the division of the roads, with the finger-post that directed weary travellers towards their destination, and I now prepared myself for the execution of my design. Not knowing whether I might not have a severe struggle to effect it, I felt that my pistols were free in the holsters, and as we came to the carrefour, drew in my reign, and gazed up at the finger-post. There, written in large characters, certainly appeared RENNES! PARIS! pointing either way, to the road towards which our horses' heads were turned, or to that which we had just travelled. On the right-hand board, however, was written ST. MALO, and as the groom was quietly riding on in the direction of Rennes, I shouted, "Holla! where are you going, good Peter?"

He came back with a sweet complacent countenance, and told me that he had been going on the road to Rennes, which was the only one we could follow; but I took the liberty of differing with him in opinion, stating that I thought the road to St. Malo would do just as well. He assured me that I was mistaken; that it would lead me at least ten miles to the right of the spot towards which my steps ought to be directed; that it was so bad our horses could not travel it; that it was infested by robbers of the worst description; and, in short, that every sort of evil under the sun awaited the unfortunate travellers who obstinately pursued that road.

I listened to the whole detail as calmly and attentively as possible; and then, much to his surprise, I informed him that I loved robbers, delighted in bad roads, enjoyed a roundabout more than a straightforward track, and was contented to undergo all the evils that he threatened, for the sake of following the path to which I had a fancy. As the matter had now become serious, and the success or failure of his scheme depended upon the next ten steps, the worthy groom took it up *en cavalier*, put on a blustering aspect, stood up in the stirrups with the frown of a Sylla, and told me that he would submit to such whims no longer.

but that go I must on the way which he thought right.

In reply to this I reminded him of one or two things which had occurred to me since I had become attached to Monsieur de Villardin, and in which my opponents had generally been worsted, when our contention came to manual operations. I believe, indeed, that I had established a very tolerable reputation for never suffering anything of the kind that I undertook to remain unfinished and imperfect; and as I was both better armed and mounted than himself, my companion was easily convinced that it would be wiser to abandon everything like compulsory measures towards me. He declared, however, that although he should certainly not attempt to force me to do what he thought right, he would take very good care not to follow me on such a road as that which I was determined to pursue.

Under some circumstances I might not have been very profoundly grieved at the idea of losing his company; for in general I had fully sufficient reliance on myself to be perfectly at my ease when I was quite alone. In the present case, however, as I strongly suspected that his design was not to deprive me of his society for long, but rather to restore it, augmented by the company of the officers from Rennes, I determined to entreat his stay with me; and, as the strongest inducement that I could hold out to him, I took one of the pistols from my saddle-bow, and levelling it at his head, with the distance of about ten yards between us, I ordered him to turn his horse up the St. Malo road without more ado, or I would shoot him on the spot. Though I saw him turn very pale at this intimation, he affected to laugh, declaring that I must be in jest; and I thought I perceived that he hesitated, whether to obey or to take his chance, and set spurs to his horse. The clicking of the lock of the pistol, judiciously timed, brought his doubts to a conclusion, and gave the preponderance to obedience. He said that he would obey, of course, if I positively directed him, for that the Duke had given him strict orders to follow my commands implicitly.

"Extremely well you have obeyed!" cried I; "but, without further words, turn your horse up the road, for I am not to be trifled with any longer."

"Well, well," he replied, as he slowly drew his bridle in the direction that I pointed out, "it was only for your own good I spoke; and if you will take a bad and dangerous road, the consequence be upon your own head."

As I thought that there was no use in driving him to desperation, I did not choose to let him know how intimately acquainted I was with the good designs he entertained in my favour; but pausing, pistol in hand, till I saw him fully launched upon the St. Malo road, I then wheeled my horse and followed, determined to keep all my discoveries to my own breast till such time as I could confide them to Monsieur de Villardin. As soon as I became sure that retreat was impossible, and that my companion must go forward on the road which I pointed out, I dropped my hostile attitude, replaced my pistol in the holster, and, joining him again, endeavoured to enter into conversation as if nothing had happened to disturb our equanimity; but, I believe, in this I expected more from human nature than human nature could afford; the man was disappointed of a good thousand crowns, besides what he had called the pickings of my saddle-bags; and he likewise laboured under the mortification of having been outwitted and bullied by a mere boy; so that he well might be, what he really was, savage and sullen for many miles of the road. In addition to his other causes of wrath, I soon perceived that he was not without some apprehension that I had discovered his designs; and I doubted not, that if he could have made himself perfectly sure that such was the case, he would have soon brought the matter between us to a struggle for life. I was accustomed to such things, however, and I did not make myself at all uneasy on that account; but keeping constantly on my guard,—for there is never any telling what may happen next in such affairs,—I rode on, taking care that an interval of two or three yards should always exist between his hand and my bridle-rein; and where the road was not sufficiently wide enough for that purpose, I made him go on before, and followed a few steps behind.

That road, however, deserves a fuller description, for it was as pleasant a road as ever I travelled in my life, excepting a few spots, of each a mile or a mile and a half in length, where a sandy soil rendered it heavy and fatiguing. A little beyond the place where we first entered upon it, a low stone wall marked the ancient boundary of a forest. Even at that time, however, the large trees had retreated more than a mile from the extreme limit of the wood; and the space that intervened between the wall and the real forest, was covered entirely with the sort of brushwood, or, as the French call it, *taillis*, which rises on the cutting down of larger timber. This gave us a fair view of the kind of ground over which the forest extended, which was of so broken and irregular a nature,—full of pits, dells, banks, and ravines, that it would have required infinite labour to render it productive of aught but that which then covered it. After the road began to wind in amongst the higher trees, some of which appeared of great antiquity, we lost all sight of the surrounding country, except where, every now and then, the ground had been cleared by some accidental circumstance, or where the track that we were pursuing ascended to some commanding height. On these occasions, indeed, we sometimes obtained a very splendid view beyond the forest, over tracts of rich and cultivated land; and, as I was beginning about that time to find out that the face of nature was a very beautiful thing, and to enjoy the aspect of a fine country with a sort of romantic delight, I often paused to gaze for a moment on any prospect that thus caught my eye. While thus engaged, my companion generally rode on in sulky silence; but I never suffered him to go far without my society, lest any of the roads which intersected the forest, and which I could not of course be expected to know, should afford him an opportunity of deviating from the prescribed track before I thought fit to permit him to do so.

I had just made one of these pauses, and my companion had just ridden on, in the manner which I have described, when, on looking after him to see how far he had proceeded, I thought I perceived a brighter gleam of sunshine than usually enlivened the gloom of the wood, streaming across the road a little beyond the point at which he had arrived. Suspecting that it might be shining down a cross road, I set spurs to my horse, and was nearly up with him before he reached the little brake. I had just time, however, to gain a more accurate knowledge of the spot, and to perceive that it was a gap, but not a road, down which the light was streaming, when there came a quick bright flash from the wood, and at the same moment, the groom fell headlong to the ground, while his horse dashed on, masterless, along the track before us, and my charger, after rearing violently, rolled over, dyeing the sand with its blood.

These sort of surprises are generally followed by a speedy explanation; and the appearance of four stout, well-dressed, good-looking gentlemen, with firelocks in their hands, pistols in their girdles, and swords by their sides, at once gave me a clear insight to the whole affair. As my poor horse, panting in the agonies of death, lay heavy upon my foot and ankle, which he had crushed beneath him in his fall, I was in no condition to offer any resistance, even had it been wise to do so against such superior numbers. The groom, indeed, was still less capable of opposing any measures that our friends with the firelocks might judge expedient, as the ball, which was probably intended for his horse, had deviated a little from its course and gone right through his head. I lay quite still also, for in all the many conflicts of one kind or another that I had witnessed, I had always remarked, that men, in working themselves up to such an action as that which our assailants had just committed, engendered in their own bosoms a great deal more fury than is at all necessary to the accomplishment of their exact purpose. This superabundant energy breaks upon the first object opposed to it; but it soon evaporates, and those who would stab you the moment after they have fired the gun, or rushed to the charge, will be a great deal humanised within five minutes after the struggle is over.

The robbers rushed immediately upon the groom like hungry wolves; and, turning him over, for he had fallen upon his face, took a hurried glance at his countenance. "Diable," cried one of our assailants, as they did so, "we have made a mistake, Messieurs. This is not the courier after all. Peste! you have killed him too, Serjeant. Why the devil did you fire so high?"

"You have done the same for the other, Hubert," replied the one he addressed.

"I hope not," said the first; "I had his horse fair enough; but let us see."

On the assurance of these charitable expressions, I ventured a low groan, which, indeed, had long wanted utterance; for the pain I suffered by the horse lying on my leg was most intense, especially as he more than once made a dying effort to start up, and then fell back again upon me.

"It is a boy," said the leader of the robbers, as they came near. "Art thou dead or alive, *mon garçon?*"

"Not quite dead," I replied, "but I cannot get up, for the horse is upon my leg."

"Ah! so I see, poor boy," said the other. "Help us here, Serjeant, and let us get him out." This was easily accomplished; and, finding that I could not stand with very great ease to myself, I sat down on the bank, rubbing my leg with both my hands, to recall it to some sensation, making up my mind, at the same time, to undergo the interrogatory which I saw was preparing for me.

The leader of the robbers gazed upon me for a moment or two with a sort of cynical grin, and then, turning to his companions, he remarked, "He takes it coolly enough, in all conscience. Come, tell us, who are you, *mon beau page?* and whither you were going?"

"I am the page of Monsieur de Villardin," replied I, "and was going to his castle of the Près Vallée."

The captain struck the butt of his firelock against the ground with a movement of impatient vexation. "This is unlucky enough," he said, "for I certainly did not want to quarrel with Monsieur de Villardin,—especially as I am such a near neighbour of his," he added with a smile; "and pray who is that?" he asked, the next moment, pointing to the body of the groom.

"That is one of his grooms," replied I, "sent to guide me on the way."

"Worse and worse," cried the captain; "why the devil, Serjeant, did you fire so high?"

"It is no great matter," answered I; "he has only shot a great rogue, who would have lived to be hanged, and whom I had nearly shot myself on the high road not an hour ago."

"Pardi, thou art a droll youth," rejoined the captain, "and, if thy tongue do not belie thee, no true Frenchman?"

"No, but what is better," replied I, "a true Englishman."

"The better I deny," answered the captain; "but I blame not your bold love for your country. However, I must see more of you, my gay lad, before I determine on letting you go: so you will come along with me. You, Serjeant, bring those saddle-bags; there may be something worth having within; and you, François, and Martin, try if you cannot bury the man down in the sand-pit yonder, and heave over the horse too if you can get it done; but bring up the saddle and bridle, for they are too good to be lost. Keep a good watch for the courier the while. He may pass by yet, though it is late. Now, come along, my man," he continued, turning towards me again; "what, cannot you walk? then, good faith, you must limp!"

Of course I did as I was directed, and limping on as well as I was able, followed my conductor through the wood for nearly a mile; at the end of which I found myself in the deepest part of the forest, and by the side of a rapid stream. A little farther up the river, I perceived the ruins of an antique mill crowning a high bank, with the remains of the wheel, long broken to pieces, now serving alone to render the waterfall by which it was formerly turned more picturesque to the eye.

Thither I was led by the robber, and on entering the old building found that it was more dilapidated in appearance than in reality; or, at least, that its present tenants had contrived to render it very habitable. Three or four more personages, of the same caste as those I had already encountered, were found within the mill; but still it was apparent that the man who had conducted me hitherto was captain of the gang, and he was immediately assailed by a thousand questions concerning some courier, for whom it was evident these gentlemen had long been waiting.

My appearance in company with their leader, at first, made them conclude that the encounter they had been expecting had taken place; but they were soon undeceived, and my unhappy saddle-bags being brought in and laid down in the midst, I had the mortification of seeing more than one rapacious hand thrust into their bowels, while piece by piece all my wardrobe was drawn forth, and at length my little store of golden crowns appeared, causing a reflected sparkling to shine in the robbers' eyes.

"A better day's work than I thought," cried Hubert, their leader; "now, young gentleman, we are men of honour and humanity, and therefore we shall let you keep your wardrobe——"

"Except that lace collar," cried one of his comrades, "which I claim for myself."—"And that embroidered band," said another, "for which I have a fancy."—"The pouch for me!" exclaimed a third; and it certainly seemed that my apparel, as well as my purse, was in a fair way to change hands. The captain, however, interfered to moderate the rapacity of his gang, and it was at length determined that not only my dress, but twenty crowns, which happened to be in my purse, should be left me. My saddle, bridle, and horse equipments, together with my silver-mounted pistols, became the property of the captain; and the only remaining question between us was, in regard to the packet of letters and orders with which Monsieur de Villardin had charged me for his farmers and agents in Brittany. These were wrapped up in a skin of leather to keep them from injury; but as soon as Master Hubert had satisfied himself that nothing but written papers were to be found within, he returned the bundle to me, saying, that he would not interfere with the discharge of my duty.

I was in hopes that this was but a prelude to my being set at liberty; but the captain did not suffer me to remain long in suspense, informing me candidly enough that I must stay with them a day or two; for that they had yet a *coup-de-main* to perform, which they trusted would enrich them sufficiently to render it both wise and expedient to change their lodging. "As soon as that is accomplished," he added, "we will despatch you upon your journey, but in the meantime we do not choose to trust to that quick tongue of yours."

As there was no help for it, I of course offered no resistance, very well understanding that the *coup-de-main* to which the captain alluded, was the contemplated attack upon the unfortunate courier from Paris to St. Malo, whose appearance, I had heard at the last inn, was daily expected. He did not show himself, however, so soon as had been anticipated, and I remained several days at the old mill, very well contented with the treatment I received from my new companions, who certainly lived upon the fat of the land, and seemed not to suffer any remembrance of the means by which it was acquired, at all to trouble its digestion. I acknowledge, too, that if I could have escaped the honour and reputation of the thing, I would very willingly have shared in some of their adventures; and I began to think that the profession of a robber, if properly conducted, might afford a very attractive sort of life.

Hubert, the captain of my new friends, was a man of a very intelligent and enquiring mind; and from the information I could give him in regard to the state of affairs in Paris, took great pleasure in my conversation. Nor did his questions alone refer to his own country, but one night he so besieged me with enquiries concerning England, its manners, customs, produce, trade, and situation, that I ended by asking him in return, if he thought of taking a trip to exercise his abilities in that country.

"Not, at least, in the manner which you suppose," replied he; and then, looking over his shoulder to see that all his companions were absent, he added, "you do not think, my boy, that my state of life has never been different from that which you now witness, or that this trade is to continue always?"

"No," replied I, quietly, "for it usually ends very speedily—at the gallows."

"It will not end so with me," answered the captain, somewhat fiercely; but the next moment his face again took on a smile, and he added, "this adventure, with what we have amassed already, will make my fortune sufficient to embark in a different speculation. The fellows who are with me may carry on their old trade if they like, but, for my part, I have had enough of it."

"I think you are very right," I replied; "it is always as well to leave off while the play is good."

"True," answered he; "but I have one warning to give you, my good youth. If, in the course of your life hereafter, you should ever meet me in a different station from that in which you now see me—such a thing may happen, you know—and if ever you do, take good care that your memory be not too retentive, for if, by either word or look, you pretend to recognise me, I shall certainly remember my old profession likewise, and take care to keep you silent by sending a ball through your head."

Though he looked very fierce as he spoke, I only laughed at his menace, asking him what benefit would accrue to me by betraying him.

"I do not know—I do not know," he replied, "but you are warned; and so beware."

As we were engaged in such familiar conversation, I would fain have asked him what sort of connection could exist between him and Monsieur de Villardin; but reflecting that he might think the question somewhat impertinent, and thence argue no great discretion on my part for the future, I thought it most prudent to be silent, lest he should take means to put it out of my power either to ask more questions at the time, or make any observations at an after period.

Four days more passed without the appearance of the courier; and the robbers beginning to be apprehensive of his having taken another road, sent out to obtain intelligence, as their stock of wine and provisions gave signs of waxing low. Their messengers soon returned, but what tidings they brought I know not. Most probably their report went to show that the courier had arrived at the next town, and would be accompanied through the forest by an escort; for almost immediately after their return, the whole band, in all nine men, set off, armed up to the teeth, taking care, in the first place, to lock me into a room which had no chimney, and was ventilated merely by a narrow window through which I certainly could not thrust my head.

They were absent about an hour; and as the wind set from the side of the high road, in less than twenty minutes after their departure I heard two smart volleys of musketry, followed by a few dropping shots.

I looked out eagerly as far as my confined casement would allow me, and at length beheld Hubert with only four of his companions on their legs, bearing along in their arms a sixth person, who seemed to be very dangerously wounded. He died, however, before he reached the mill; and the others, laying him down on the grass, came onward with a small leathern valise, which, by the manner in which they carried it, I judged to be very weighty. Their arrival was followed by long and eager conversations, and a great deal of hurry and noise, but to what all this bustle referred I do not know, as they did not think fit to let me out of durance for nearly three hours. During that time, I saw from the window nine of the horses which they possessed brought out, of which six were instantly saddled, and loaded with a portion of their movables.

As soon as this was complete, to my surprise I beheld the captain come out, and, after shooting upon the spot the three horses that remained unsaddled, mount, together with his four men, apparently in order to depart. My first thought was that they were about to leave me shut up where I was, and I looked round for the means of forcing open the door when they were gone; but the moment after, as I turned towards the casement, in order to observe their further proceedings, Hubert called to me to draw back from the window; and, as I obeyed, he threw in, through the aperture, the key of the room in which I was confined. As I stooped to pick it up, I heard the sound of their horses' feet galloping away; and before I had opened the door, and arrived at the bank of the stream, the last horseman of the five was out of sight, though, with greater consideration than I had any reason to expect, they had left a horse saddled at the door for my use.

CHAPTER XII.

When my worthy acquaintance Hubert and his companions had departed in the manner I have described in the last chapter, I had time to look round me, and consider both my own situation and theirs who had just left me.

From everything I had seen I could not doubt that the encounter with the courier and his escort had taken place, and that the robbers had proved successful. It was evident, however, that the struggle had been severe; and from the slaughter of three of their horses, as well as from their leaving a fourth for myself, I was led to conclude that four of the gang had perished in the affray. At all events, no doubt could exist as to their having left their late dwelling for ever: and I certainly was not a little obliged to them for the care which they had taken to provide me with the means of pursuing my journey.

Nevertheless, I judged that it might be expedient to examine their habitation and its vicinity thoroughly before I quitted it; and, on doing so, I found that in the hurry of their departure they had left behind them my own saddle and accoutrements, which I instantly placed upon the horse instead of those with which they had furnished him, not knowing how far the fact of sitting in a thief's saddle might not compromise me with those who might chance to be in pursuit of the thief. Having added my own peculiar saddle-bags to the load of my charger, I took such a general survey of the ground and the road which led to it as might be useful afterwards, and bidding farewell to the old mill, made the best of my way back to the high road. As I never forgot a path that I had once travelled, I had no difficulty in retracing my steps to the exact point at which I had fallen into the hands of the robbers, and gladly found myself once more on the road towards St. Malo, free from any apprehension of fresh interruption.

The affray, however, with the courier and his escort, must have taken place farther up the road, for it could not have failed to have left bloody traces wherever it occurred; and I met with none such in my onward journey, which I now pursued in the same direction that I had been following when I was interrupted. To tell the truth, I was not at all sorry to have no direct knowledge of the affair, for in these cases concealment is almost as bad as the crime itself, and it must be remembered that I was not in a situation to put my head willingly into the jaws of justice. I was, therefore, well contented that the robbery of the courier, and the murder of his escort, had passed totally without my personal cognisance, although I had no doubt whatever of the facts. To put myself as far, too, from the scene as possible, I galloped on pretty quickly till I came to a carrefour, where the road I was pursuing was crossed by that from St. Aubin to Rennes. It was at the distance of at least ten miles from the scene of my late adventures; and as I came up to it I perceived, seated on the little mound of earth at the foot of the guide-post, a man in the dress of a pedlar, with his box of wares laid down by his side. At first he was turned in such a manner as to prevent me from seeing his face; but the sound of my horse's feet causing him to look round, he displayed a countenance garnished with a long, black beard, an ornament which at that time was beginning to fall into great disrepute throughout all civilised Europe—so much so, indeed, that no such thing was to be seen in all France, except perhaps on the faces of Jews and Capuchins, and a few which had descended from the reign of Henri Quatre, and were, I suppose, valued by their owners on the score of their antiquity.

The one before me at present was voluminous and massy; but, nevertheless, it did not serve to conceal from me the identity of the wearer with an acquaintance whose face had boasted no such appendage a fortnight before. I affected not to recognise him, however, and dismounting from my horse—which instantly betrayed its ancient habits by browsing the roadside—I sat down on the same mound with the other traveller, and began conversing with him as a peddling Jew. He spoke learnedly and lamentably upon the evils and inconveniences of his own profession, and ended by moralising so sagely upon the necessity of bearing our own portion of ills with constancy and calmness, that I could not help exclaiming, "Ah! my dear philosopher, you are now quite complete: when I knew you on the Quai des Orfèvres you wanted nothing of Socrates but the beard."

Jacques Marlot shook his head. "Can your eyes see through stone walls, little serpent?" he cried; "but remark what your good crowns have done for me; procured me this box of trumpery, and a beard that is worth half the money."

"I am heartily glad to see you so well equipped," replied I; "although your imprudence, joined to my own, had very nearly procured me a journey to the Bastile, and has actually caused me to be stripped of a thousand crowns." I then related to the ci-devant printer all that had occurred to me since we last met, and I was glad to find that he sincerely felt for all the inconveniences I had suffered, and pressed me to take back again the sum of five crowns, which was all that he had remaining of thirty I had given him. He declared at the same time that he himself could do very well without, for that the contents of his box, assisted by a fluent tongue and the gullibity of the peasantry, had proved quite sufficient, since he began his new trade, to maintain him as well as he could desire, though to say the truth his taste for the good things of life was not the most moderate.

I refused to accept his offer, of course, telling him that money was quite unnecessary to me, as I counted upon reaching the castle of Monsieur de Villardin in less than an hour.

"You are quite mistaken, my son," he replied, "whether you mean his castle of the Prés Vallée, or that of Dumont; the first being at the distance of at least twenty, and the latter nearly forty miles from the place where we now stand."

This intelligence surprised me a good deal, as I found that I had entirely miscalculated my situation, and had mistaken my road. Jacques Marlot, however, who, as well as his uncle, good Jerome Laborde, was a native of the country, and acquainted with every rood of ground round about, undertook to guide me on my way, and, walking my horse by his side as he trudged on, we arrived within a few miles of Rennes that night. The next morning, after sleeping in one of the neighbouring villages, we separated, he intending to proceed to St. Malo, to carry on his traffic with any of the seamen arriving from foreign ports, and I turning my steps in the direction of the Près Vallée, to which he pointed out the road.

No further accident or adventure occurred to delay my arrival, and about ten o'clock in the morning I reached the place of my destination. Here I was received with all due reverence by the domestics who tenanted the house, and delivered all the letters which I bore to the farmers and receivers of Monsieur de Villardin.

Nothing could be more beautiful, though nothing could be more solemn, than the aspect of the castle, and the scene that surrounded it. It was a fortified house, of no great military strength, situated on a slight eminence, rising above the vast rich meadows that stretch for many miles along the borders of the Vilaine. These meadows were broken,—for I cannot call it separated—by large belts of magnificent forest trees, which seemed to owe their planting to the hand of nature rather than to that of man, but which, nevertheless, had been so skilfully thinned, that the boughs of one never interfered with the boughs of another; and each grew up in liberty, protecting, as it were, under its branches, its own particular domain, without infringing upon the bounds of its neighbours. Each of these belts varied in shape and distribution; but each left from fifty to sixty acres of pasture ground clear and open within its circuit, with the river generally forming the boundary on one side, and the trees sweeping round on every other, so that each meadow seemed to be a spot of rich ground which had been cleared and cultivated ages ago, in the midst of a vast forest, the trees of which were still standing around. In fact, a person placed in the centre of any of these open spaces saw nothing but wood beyond the meadow that surrounded him, till, walking on for a minute or two, under the shade of gigantic elms and oaks, he entered another wide pasture field like that he had just left.

The effect of the whole would have been gloomy, had it not been enlivened by the frequent turns of the river, and the sight of cattle and sheep feeding in the various savannahs, under the charge of their several herds, who most frequently were found cheering their occupation with a song. There was something calm, and simple, and patriarchal in the whole scene, which struck me greatly as I passed through it, and I could have fancied myself removed by thousands of years and thousands of miles from the countries and the times through which I had lately been moving.

The castle itself, built of cold grey stone, and covered in several parts with ivy, was in perfect harmony with everything around it: and the good taste of Monsieur de Villardin, who entered fully into the peculiar character of the scene, had left all the furniture and decorations of the house—which were rich and good, though in antique style and form—exactly as they had come into his possession.

As I propose to write down in this book the changes of my disposition and character as I advanced through life, as well as the various turns of fortune that attended me in my progress through the world, I must pause for a moment to speak of that which was passing within my own heart, while the events which I have described were working out my general fate.

A new spirit was about this time beginning to spring up in my bosom, and a taste for things that I never before enjoyed was every day developing itself more and more. Whether it was that Lord Masterton had first called my attention to the beauties of nature, or whether it was that before my acquaintance with him I never had time to think of them, I cannot tell; but certainly I began to feel a delight in the aspect of such scenes as the Près Vallée, which formerly I had never experienced; and during the first two or three days I fancied that I could remain there alone for ever.

I had not yet learned, it is true, to examine very closely what I felt, but I remember at the time thinking it strange, that whereas not two years before I could have passed through the fairest scenes in nature without giving them any particular attention, unless they were lighted up by pike and gun, I now stopped to gaze, without well knowing why, whenever anything that was fair or sweet met my eye. I might not, indeed, look at Nature's face with the feelings of a painter or of a poet; but I certainly did begin to experience great pleasure in the contemplation of a beautiful prospect, and would turn away when I had done so, pleased, but thoughtful, I might almost say sad.

I felt this more than I had ever felt it before in the solitude of my new dwelling, and many an hour I passed away in various sylvan sports, which, while they gave me active employment, still led me into the fairest scenes in the country round.

Nevertheless, I found myself bound in duty to Monsieur de Villardin to make him acquainted with all the incidents of my journey; and though at that time I loved not sitting at a desk, even as long as was required to write a short letter, yet, forcing myself to the task with a great effort, I detailed everything that had occurred to me, and despatched the epistle to St. Aubin,—for I would not trust it at Rennes—to go by the next ordinary courier to Paris. Nothing happened to disturb my tranquillity for the ten days that followed, and I remained fishing in the streams, or shooting the wolves and the boars, with very little intermission. On one occasion, indeed, having a letter to deliver from the Duke to his intendant at his other estate of Dumont, I rode over thither, and found a very different scene from that presented by the Près Vallée—rocks and mountains, and streams and waterfalls, with a modern house, modern alleys, modern bridges, and modern furniture. In the mood which then possessed me, however, the Près Vallée was more to my taste, and I returned to its calm shades as soon as possible, leaving the letter to be delivered to the intendant, who was absent at the time of my arrival.

At the end of ten days a courier reached the Près Vallée from Paris, bringing a large packet addressed to myself, on opening which I found a short letter from Monsieur de Villardin, directing me to wait for a fortnight longer in Brittany for the purpose of bringing up the rents of several of his farms, and referring to another more voluminous paper contained in the same packet, which, as I soon perceived, expressed the will and pleasure of the King that no proceedings should take place against John Marston Hall, for the rescue of a prisoner from the hands of the criminal lieutenant, and authorised him to plead the royal grace and pardon in all matters referring thereto.

This, as may well be supposed, afforded a great relief to my mind, for it was by no means pleasant to go about the world with the fear of the Bastile hanging about the neck of one's imagination. Although I had now no apprehensions from the pursuit of justice, I soon began to feel the solitude of the Près Vallée less delightful than it had seemed at first; and though, had there been anyone to share my sports, or to occupy my time, I should still have enjoyed it much, yet the hours gradually became somewhat tiresome, shut up in an old castle, with nothing but solemn woods around one, and a library of old books for my sole companions. I now, however, found the Latin with which Lord Masterton had furnished me turn to some account; and after having read Ovid two or three times through, I dipped into Lucan, and pored over several other books, in order to while away the evenings.

At length, with infinite joy, I heard that the rents were all paid into the hands of the intendant, with the exception of a small sum, which was expected the next day; and I directed the courier, who had remained for the purpose of returning with me to Paris, to prepare for our journey on the third day. Scarcely had I given the order, however, when a letter reached me, brought by the King's ordinary to Rennes. It was in the hand-writing of Monsieur de Villardin, and contained but a few words, which were evidently written under feelings of agitation or haste. In this billet, for letter I can scarcely call it, he directed me to forbear my journey, as he himself and his whole household would be at the Près Vallée in six days from the date of his letter; and he then went on to bid me communicate this fact to the various domestics in the château, in order that it might be prepared, as usual, for his reception.

This change of destination was not unpleasant to me, for all I now wanted was society and occupation; and, prevented as I had been, by my youth and my English birth, from entering into the debaucheries or factions of Paris, its routine had become wearisome to me even before I quitted it. All was now bustle in the château. As the autumn was coming on, fires were lighted in every apartment, and busy hands were engaged in removing the dust which, during the last two years, had accumulated in the untenanted rooms. My solitary residence of a month in the midst of such scenes as those around me had, I believe, done more to call forth whatever portion of imagination entered into the composition of John Marston Hall than all the events of his former life. Lord Masterton, as I have before said, had done a good deal, it is true; but even when I quitted him, my great thirst was for action, not for thought. Now a new ingredient seemed mingling with my nature: I began to view the things around me in a different light; and though I would fain have had someone to converse with, yet I could dream even alone. Thus, during the next two or three days, when the evening had closed in, and I was left in the old library by myself, after reading for an hour or two, I would rise, and, without a candle, wander through all the dim vast halls and gloomy chambers of the Près Vallée, watching the flickering light of the fires, kindled in each chamber to scare away the damp, as the flame flashed faintly from time to time upon the rich arras and dark hangings, and dreaming all the time of heaven knows what compound of scenes and adventures which those chambers might have witnessed in times past.

My conduct in these respects, indeed, was somewhat strangely misconstrued by an old female domestic who always remained in the house; but as the misconstruction was all to my advantage, I had no reason to complain. By a little civility and kindness, I had established with her the character of a complete phœnix of pages; and I afterwards found that old Marguerite assured Madame de Villardin, on her arrival, that I had every night made a complete tour of the château to see that the fires were burning, and the rooms properly aired. At length, after waiting two days in hourly expectation of the coming of Monsieur de Villardin, an avant-courier arrived, and in about two hours more the cavalcade appeared in the avenue. In Paris, where one never saw the whole household of the Duke collected, one was not aware of the numbers it contained; but now, when two carriages, each containing eight people, and drawn by six horses, were followed up to the gates by twenty-four horsemen, one began to have a much more respectful idea of Monsieur de Villardin's establishment than one had formerly entertained. The Duke himself was on horseback; and, springing to the ground the first, he gave his hand to the Duchess, who appeared to me pale and languid. Both spoke kindly to me: but I could clearly perceive that something was wrong in the domestic comfort of the family; and I soon found that the defects of Monsieur de Villardin's temper and character had not been greatly improved since I had left Paris. Old Jerome Laborde was my principal oracle in these matters, and from him I learned, that for some weeks the Duchess had been very gay in the capital; had been out continually, except when she received company at home, and had been universally admired and praised. All this had been less agreeable to Monsieur de Villardin than it might have been to a man of a more happy disposition; and after becoming irritable and morose in a considerable degree, he had suddenly announced his determination of retiring to Brittany.

Madame de Villardin, unconscious of offence herself, and, as most women do, mistaking her husband's character, endeavoured to argue him out of his resolution. A discussion ensued, the particulars of which did not transpire, even to the all-enquiring ears of soubrettes and valets de chambre; but the whole household perceived that it must have been bitter and severe, for when it was over, Madame de Villardin was found fainting, and bathed in tears. The arrangements for departure were hurried from that moment; and before three days were over, the whole party were on their way to the Près Vallée.

As the old man told me this story spontaneously, I thought I might, at least, venture to ask whether he believed the Duke to have any real cause for the jealousy that he evidently felt.

"None on earth," replied the major-domo. "My lady is gay and lively, and loves well enough to be admired; but she loves my Lord dearly, we are all convinced; and, depend upon it, no woman ever went astray yet without the servants finding it out."

CHAPTER XIII.

For a time, the change produced on the domestic affairs of Monsieur de Villardin, by his retirement from Paris, was a great improvement. The Duke seemed to feel himself more at ease in the country than the description of good Jerome Laborde permitted me to believe he had been in the town; and Madame de Villardin, like a wise woman, making up her mind to what she could not avoid, seemed determined to dedicate herself wholly to rural occupations and to the wife's first task of making his home comfortable and tranquil to her husband. Matters thus soon assumed a new aspect. Monsieur de Villardin, who was naturally of a warm and affectionate disposition, gave way fully to all the better feelings of his heart; and I have never seen a more happy household than that which, for the month that followed, was presented by the château of the Près Vallée, although Madame de Villardin herself had become far more grave and matronly than she had appeared in Paris. The Duke, with the natural eagerness and activity of his disposition, was, of course, obliged to find himself constant employment; but to a man so fond of field sports as he was, the country around us presented an unfailing source of amusement. Now it was a fishing party, now it was an expedition against the stags, the boars, or the wolves; now it was a walk to bring home a chevreuil, which furnished us with the day's entertainment; and, on most of these occasions, I was glad to find that Madame de Villardin, at her own request, accompanied her husband.

For my part, the whole was joy and satisfaction to me; for it was evident that all those whose affections I coveted were daily growing more fond of me; the Duke was never tired of praising my method of conducting their sports; Madame de Villardin seemed to take a delight in seeing me play with her little girl; the servants, who were sure to meet all good offices and no evil ones from my hands, found a great difference between myself and such pages as they were accustomed to encounter, with whom the ordinary domestics of a house are generally in a state of open warfare. The two younger pages themselves were my pets and my protégés; and the only one who hated me, with a tolerable degree of malevolence, was my first enemy, Master Gaspard de Belleville, whose fear was the only restraint upon his animosity. Certain it is, that his dislike was not particularly diminished during our stay at the Près Vallée. The increasing regard and confidence of our mutual lord towards myself, the frequent rebukes and mortifications that his awkwardness and inactivity in all our field sports called upon himself, as well as the total disregard with which I treated him, all served to increase and cultivate his original distaste towards me. It is true he never dared to show his hatred in such a manner as to give me an excuse for resenting it; but it peeped out in a thousand little words and actions, amongst which, one of the pettiest, but one which best showed his feelings, was a habit which he had of never calling me by my name when speaking of me to others, but always designating me—l'Anglais—l'Étranger (the Englishman—the Foreigner). For all this I was very easily consoled, and indeed scarcely noticed it at all. Monsieur de Villardin, however, himself took notice of the latter circumstance I have mentioned, and one day sharply reproved him for not speaking of me by my name. "Call him, sir," he said, "by his proper appellation,—Monsieur Hall; and remember that he is better born, as well as better educated, than yourself."

Of another, and far more serious trait of his ill will towards myself, I received, about this time, proofs quite sufficient to satisfy myself, though perhaps they were not quite irrefragable.

Shortly after the arrival of the family at the Près Vallée, the Duke took me out with him alone; and causing me to walk by his side, made me give him a far more full and detailed account of all my adventures on the road than I had been able to do by letter. When I had done, he asked me if I had been imprudent enough, before quitting Paris, to acknowledge to anyone but himself the share I had had in the liberation of Jacques Marlot.

"To no one, I assure you, my Lord," I replied; "even to his own uncle, Jerome Laborde, I never mentioned the facts; merely telling him—to quiet the old man's mind—that I had heard his nephew had been liberated, without adding one word which could induce him to believe that I had any share in the transaction."

"It is very extraordinary, indeed," said the Duke in reply; "but it is an undoubted fact, that between the time of your aiding to rescue the prisoner and my visit to the Hôtel de Bouillon that night, the police had obtained the most perfect account of your person, appearance, dress, and situation. Can you remember," he added, "whether there was anyone present when you related the circumstances to me?"

"No one, my Lord," I replied, "as you may remember, but Gaspard de Belleville."

Monsieur de Villardin shook his head. "Indeed!" he said; "Indeed! Yet I cannot believe the boy would be either so base or so foolish as to betray such a conversation. However," he added, changing the subject abruptly, "of course, as you have suffered robbery while engaged in my service, I shall not allow you to lose by anything of the kind. The sum which was taken from you shall be repaid to you as soon as we return home; and, in the meantime, do not let any suspicion of Gaspard appear in your behaviour towards him."

"There exists so very little communication between us, my Lord," I replied, "on any subject, that there is no fear of my betraying any such feeling; and certainly, more than ever, I shall take care to conceal it, since you desire me to do so."

The same evening, the Duke gave me an order upon his intendant for the full sum which I had lost; and, as a still greater proof of his regard, ordered an apartment in the immediate vicinity of his own, consisting of two very comfortable chambers, to be prepared for my sole use.

This state of things had continued about a month, when a rumour became prevalent in our little world that the Duchess was again pregnant; and, about the same time, after a deep and fearful fit of gloom, of which no one understood the cause, Monsieur de Villardin shut himself up almost entirely in his library and his bedchamber, and was hardly seen by anybody for several days. Madame de Villardin, too, was observed several times in tears, and everything appeared once more to be going wrong in the family. At the end of a few days, however, a change was wrought in the Duke himself, apparently by the exhortations of his confessor, who was frequently with him for several hours at a time. Of this excellent man I shall have occasion to speak more hereafter; and here it is only necessary to say, that the influence he possessed over the mind of Monsieur de Villardin was at all times extraordinary. His usual residence was at Rennes, and consequently he had not seen the Duke for more than two years; but his authority did not seem to have been at all shaken, nor the bold tone of his reproof at all softened by absence; for I remember once, on passing the library door, which was ajar, having unwillingly overheard him myself tax his penitent with absolute madness. However that might be, the Duke very soon resumed his usual habits; and it appeared to me that he endeavoured, by increased kindness, to efface from the mind of the Duchess whatever effect any harshness he had shown her might have produced. Most gladly did she seem to catch at every renewed proof of his affection; and the happiness of the family was again apparently restored for the time, when one morning, as we were about to set out to hunt in the neighbourhood, the young Count de Mesnil, who had rescued the Duke out of the hands of the butchers in Paris, and who had since been a frequent visitor at his house, rode up to the gates, and was received with a joyous welcome by both the Duke and his lady. He, like Monsieur de Villardin, had come into Brittany to spend some time on his estates; and as his dwelling was within seven miles of the Près Vallée, his visits soon became very nearly as frequent as they had been in Paris.

At first the natural bent of Madame de Villardin's disposition led her into some of those little acts of gaiety and display from which a habitual love of admiration rendered it almost impossible for her to refrain; but very soon, and somewhat suddenly, her manner towards the young Count assumed an air of great coldness; and I easily divined the cause both of this change and of the great affection which Monsieur de Mesnil appeared to feel for the lord and family of the Près Vallée.

Strange to say, Monsieur de Villardin, awake to the slightest word in other instances, and suspicious where there was no cause, was in the present case totally blind, long after Madame de Villardin herself had become aware of the designs of their visitor. He had known the Count de Mesnil as a mere boy, and he still looked on him as such. This might be one cause of his blindness; but, in truth, I believe, there is also a sort of fatality in such cases, or rather a madness, which, to a suspicious mind, makes truth look like falsehood, and falsehood appear to be truth. I felt very much for Madame de Villardin, whose situation appeared to be painful in the extreme; and whose conduct towards the Count de Mesnil, as far, at least, as I could see, was now faultless; but, of course, I dared not say a word to open the eyes of my Lord upon such a subject, without having some decided fact to warrant my interference.

In this state of affairs, nearly two months more passed over our heads, without any circumstance occurring to change my own situation or that of the other parties; Monsieur de Villardin continuing extremely partial to the society of his young neighbour, and the Duchess, on the contrary, treating him with a degree of cold haughtiness which approached towards rudeness. At length, one morning, shortly after the Count de Mesnil, who had been upon a visit at the Près Vallée, had left the house in order, as it seemed, to return home, Monsieur de Villardin set out on horseback, intending to proceed to Rennes, accompanied by myself, Gaspard de Belleville, and one or two grooms. When we were about a mile and a half from the château, however, he suddenly remembered that a packet, referring to the business which called him to the city, had been left on the table of his library; and, as it was of some importance, he directed me to ride back and bring it to him at Rennes. I accordingly lost no time in returning to the Près Vallée; but was somewhat surprised, when about half a mile from the house, to remark a horse, which I very well recognized as that of Count de Mesnil, tied to one of the old trees which I have before described. I had taken a short cut across the meadows, which deviation from the high road had led me through a part of the grounds that, lying at a distance from any of the ordinary paths, was generally very lonely; but, in truth, when I beheld this sight, I wished that I had pursued any other way; for I apprehended, and not without cause, that I might soon be placed in one of the most painful situations that it is possible to conceive. I had, however, but one task to perform—to do the errand on which I was sent; but, in order to see as little as possible, I rode to the back of the château, and, entering from the offices, went up by one of the back staircases into the library. That room, however, opened again into the small saloon, and the door by which I entered fronted the other, which was unclosed, and exactly opposite to which, on the wall of the saloon, was hung a large Venetian mirror in a silver frame. The moment I entered, I heard voices, and my eye involuntarily rested on the mirror, in which I beheld the reflection of two figures; that of the Duchess, with her back to the glass, so that I could not see the expression of her countenance, and that of Monsieur de Mesnil, kneeling at her feet and holding her hand with some degree of force in his own, while he pressed his lips upon it.

Although, as I have said, I could not see the face of the Duchess, her words, and the tone in which they were pronounced, were quite sufficient to show me that she was repelling indignantly the grossest insult that woman can receive from man.

"If you do not instantly quit me, sir," she exclaimed in a loud and vehement voice, "I will call those who can and will protect me against your daring insolence. Rise, sir, rise: I do not know which is the most to be despised, your affectation of love for a woman you insult, or your hypocrisy in pretending friendship for the man you endeavour to wrong."

The Count was not without all those ordinary arguments on the subject by which men furnish women, who are already inclined to degrade themselves, with excuses for so doing. I did not allow him time, however, to make use of his oratory; but, by oversetting one of the tables in the library, gave him intimation that someone was near. Immediate and not very dignified flight was his resource, and taking his way through another door, he left the Duchess without any great ceremony in bidding her adieu. As I saw her approaching the library, I also made my escape by the back staircase as rapidly as if I had been on some furtive expedition. The truth is, that my mind, for the first time in my life, I believe, was not made up how to act; and I did not wish to encounter Madame de Villardin until I had formed my determination. I had also obtained the packet for which I was sent, so that I had no cause to stay longer; and, mounting again in the back court, I rode forward towards Rennes.

Although I knew that Monsieur de Villardin waited for the papers, my pace was slow, I confess; for I was embarrassed with meditations, which were not easily brought to an end. Had I been sure that the Duchess would have told her own story to her husband I might have held my peace, and suffered the matter to take its course; but I clearly saw that the causeless jealousy of Monsieur de Villardin himself had so greatly alarmed his wife, that it was very doubtful whether she would open his eyes to the perfidy of his friend, not knowing what strange and violent effect the communication might produce. At the same time I remembered the promise I had made, never to see him wronged, without making him aware of the fact; but though this promise was decided, yet I felt afraid to perform it, and was long in considering how I might do so in such a manner as to fulfil my duty, and yet to guard against the slightest suspicion falling upon his innocent wife. It may be thought, indeed, that for this purpose, I had nothing to do but to tell all that I had seen, precisely as I had seen it; but Monsieur de Villardin was not famous for hearing anyone to an end, and I therefore knew that the effect of the first part of my tale would, probably, be to prevent his attending to one word of its conclusion. Eventually, however, I both made up my mind to tell him what I had witnessed, and fixed upon the means of making him hear me out; and as soon as this was settled, I put my horse into a gallop, and never stopped till I was in Rennes.

The business which had taken him to the provincial capital detained him for several hours, but was ultimately settled to his satisfaction, and he returned homeward in a happier mood than any I had lately witnessed. He was more calm and placid than he had been for months, and met his wife with that confiding and affectionate air, which I hoped might induce her to open her whole heart to her husband at once. Had she done so, what misery she would have saved him! but she was too much afraid of him to act in the only manner that could have rebuked suspicion for ever. As I was almost constantly, on some excuse or another, in the saloon or library, I had sufficient opportunity of watching my Lord's countenance, and I scanned it eagerly during the evening, to see whether the tale had been told. He was so cheerful and so gay, that his face, like a summer sky, would, in a moment, have betrayed the slightest cloud that came over him; but the day closed without any appearing, and it was clear that the Duchess, most weakly, had determined to conceal the insult offered to her by the Count de Mesnil from her husband.

The task then lay with me; and when Madame de Villardin had retired for the night, I entreated the Duke to grant me a few minutes' audience. He first heard my request with a smile, and asked whether to-morrow would not do as well; but the next moment his demon woke suddenly up, a cloud came over his brow, and I could see that suspicion and distrust were once more alive. Starting up, he took one of the tapers, and beckoning me into the library, which was more retired and secure than the saloon, he shut the door, and casting himself into an arm-chair, exclaimed, almost fiercely, "Now! boy! Now! What is it you have to say?"

I saw that he was dreadfully agitated, even by his own imaginations, for as yet I had not said one word to cause the slightest emotion; but still, as I have said, he was moved in an extraordinary degree; and I knew that unless I took the means on which I had before resolved to gain an uninterrupted hearing, my story would be cut short in the midst. Advancing, therefore, as near as I well could, I knelt down before him, and said, "My Lord, I have something to tell you; but you are so quick, that I am afraid of your not hearing it all. If you will give me your word of honour that you will hear every word I have to say without interrupting me, I will go on; but if you will not, I will hold my tongue, and, on my life, nothing shall ever make me open my lips."

He repaid me with a fierce glance for the conditions that I made; but as he knew that I was one to keep my word, he promised most solemnly to hear me to an end.

"Well then, my Lord," I said, "I shall only further claim, that as you give credit to one part of my story, so you shall give credit to the other; for every word that I am about to speak is equally true."

I then proceeded to recount all that I had seen in the morning after he had sent me back for the papers; and never did I see a more terrific struggle take place in a human being than that which agitated him during the recital. When I first spoke of Monsieur de Mesnil's horse tied to the tree, he had nearly broke forth; and when I came to relate the scene that first met my eye in the library, he started up from off his chair with every muscle of his face working under excessive emotion. He remembered his promise, however; and sitting down again, covered his eyes with his hand while I proceeded; but as I concluded with the words which his wife had uttered, he caught me by the arm, and gazed eagerly in my face, exclaiming,—"Ha! did she say that?"

"On my honour! On my soul, she did," I replied, "as I hope in heaven!"

"Boy, you have saved me!" he exclaimed, sinking back in the chair; and, to my astonishment, I saw a tear rise up in his eye and roll over his cheek. He brushed it hastily away, and then, laying his hand kindly upon my shoulder, said, "John Marston, you have done your duty well and nobly, and by taking the means you have to make me hear you out, you have conferred an obligation on your lord that must never bo forgotten. To a boy of your age I cannot speak as I might to others of the vice and evil that reigns amongst our highest dames in Paris; but let it suffice, that a woman who so degrades herself, becomes, to my mind, a thing of loathing and abhorrence; and if you can conceive what it is to love with the deepest intensity, you may understand what it would be to behold the beloved object suddenly change from the dearest jewel of your heart to the foulest object that earth can present to your eyes. It is worse, a thousand times, than to see the blighting change from life to death. But you have saved me; for the very suspicion of such a thing would be madness.— But you have saved me; and, after that noble speech, I shall never henceforth entertain a doubt or a fear."

How deeply, how sadly, he deceived himself may easily be divined; for where was there yet a suspicious man that ever laid aside his suspicions?

"As to the Count de Mesnil," he added, his lip curling both with scorn and anger, "I look upon him but as a worm: he is one of the many who think it honourable, and gay, and brilliant, to act, as she justly said, the hypocrite and the villain; and is contemptible. Nevertheless, he must not go unpunished, and must be cared for. On his account I will speak with you to-morrow; but in the meantime repeat once more what your lady replied."

I did as he bade me, and he marked every syllable attentively.

"You vary not a word," he said; "and I well know that your honour and your memory never fail. You have saved me from torments not to be told, and perhaps, from deeds that might have brought greater torments still; you have acted wisely and nobly, and henceforth I treat you as my son. Now leave me, my good boy, and to-morrow, by six of the clock be here in the library, when we will speak of what further steps are to be taken in this affair."

I left him without reply, and went to bed, satisfied with my own conduct, and gratified by the result. The next morning I was in the library as the clock struck the hour that he had named; but Monsieur de Villardin was down before me, and had probably been so some time, as there were several sheets of parchment before him, and he had just concluded the writing of a paper at some length as I entered. He looked up with a smile when he perceived me, and said, "General St. Maur, or, as I believe I ought to call him, Lord Langleigh, informed me that he and Lord Masterton had, in recompence for the services you had rendered them, assigned you a sufficient revenue from one of their farms to maintain you at ease in the station which you are destined to fill. Pray how much did they thus grant you?"

"A thousand crowns per annum, my lord," replied I; "and, indeed, in your house I do not know what to do with it."

"Oh, time will teach you plenty of uses for it," answered the Duke; "and for the service you have rendered me, I am about to add nearly double what you already possess. There is a small farm, which I bought lately, near my estates at Dumont, which produces about eighteen hundred crowns; and besides the farm-house, there is upon it the dwelling of the former proprietor, whose family is now extinct. It is called Juvigny. I give it to you for ever, holding only the right of guardianship over you and it, till you are of age by law to use it yourself. There are the papers, together with my directions to a notary in regard to the cession. Bid a groom take them to Rennes, and bring back the deed drawn up this evening, when I will sign it."

Warmly, most warmly, did I express my gratitude, fancying myself now richer than princes; for the sum of three thousand crowns per annum went far beyond any dreams which I yet had of expense. Monsieur de Villardin smiled at the enthusiasm with which I poured forth the thanks, and at the ideas I seemed to entertain of the boundlessness of my wealth.

"Well, well," he said, "you will learn to appreciate it more justly in time. Go now and give the groom the papers, with particular orders to bring back the deed to-night, for no one can tell what to-morrow may bring forth. Return to me as soon as you have given him your directions."

I immediately obeyed, and choosing one of the grooms who was my more especial favourite in the family, I gave him the papers, with injunctions to use all speed and diligence. I then returned to the library, and found that the Duke had just concluded a billet, on which he wrote the address of the Count de Mesnil, and after drawing a small cord of floss silk across the folds, he sealed the ligature at both ends, and put the note into my hands:—"You will take that," he said, with a calm smile, "to our good friend the Count de Mesnil; but do not go till after breakfast, nor let it seem, by your manner, that there is anything extraordinary in your mission; for, to my taste, things of this kind had better always be conducted as quietly as possible. Deliver it into the Count's own hand, when you have reached his dwelling, and bring me back his reply."

Of course I very well understood that I was charged with one of those cartels of mortal defiance which were then so common in every country of Europe. The matter certainly was nothing new to me, for many a very trifling dispute had I seen brought to the arbitrement of the sword when I followed the camp of the Cavaliers; but it did seem strange to me that the Duke so far departed from the general customs of the day as to send his defiance by a page, instead of by some man equal in rank and station to the person for whom it was intended. I found afterwards, however, that his irritable fear of ridicule, which was the next prominent characteristic of his mind to its susceptibility of the slightest suspicion, was the cause of anything that appeared irregular in his method of proceeding. However that might be, of course I did not object to the task, though it seemed to me doubtful how Monsieur de Mesnil would receive such a cartel from a page, and what might be his treatment of the bearer. Personal risk seldom entered into my calculation in these matters, and I ordered my horse to be ready after breakfast, and a groom to be prepared to accompany me, as gaily as if I had been going upon an errand of pleasure. Before setting out, however, I had an opportunity of seeing the behaviour of the Duke towards his wife, and it, I confess, was the first thing that gave me any pain in the business. It was so gentle, so affectionate, so different from what it had been on former occasions, that, as the thought flashed across my mind, that the first day of such tenderness might be the last of his life, I would have given more than all I had in the world to have prevented the proposed encounter from taking place. To do so was, of course, impossible; and accordingly after breakfast I mounted my horse, and rode away for Mesnil Moray, the dwelling of Monsieur de Villardin's adversary.

Though I was a little gloomy when I set out, old habits soon got the better of new feelings, and I readily brought myself to look upon the affair altogether as one of those matters which every man must undertake, at least a hundred times in the course of his life. "Monsieur de Villardin," I thought, "will fight fifty more, I hope, before he has done with the sword," and with this consolatory reflection, I cantered on as fast as I could. Somewhat less than an hour brought me to the gates of the château; and, on demanding to see Monsieur de Mesnil, I was instantly admitted to his presence. I thought he turned rather pale when he saw me, but it might be merely imaginary; and certainly, throughout the whole, he behaved like a man of honour and courage. He took the billet, and, cutting the silk, read it attentively, with a slight frown knitting his brows. He then asked me in a calm tone, "Do you know the contents of this note, young man?"

The question puzzled me a little, for though I strongly suspected the general nature of what the billet contained, yet I knew none of the particulars, and could not even be sure of that which I imagined. I answered, therefore, that "I did not;" and the Count rejoined, throwing the note into the fire, "Well, then, as Monsieur de Villardin has been kind enough to send me an unceremonious request, I will send him an unceremonious reply. Tell him I will accept his invitation, with all its particulars, and that I am his very obedient servant. You may add, I would have written, but that I have a great deal to do between this and night."

Charged with this ambiguous message, I returned to the Près Vallée, and found Monsieur de Villardin playing with his little girl, while Madame de Villardin was in her own chamber, preparing to go out with him for a walk.

"Have you brought any note?" he asked me immediately, taking advantage of his wife's absence, to inquire the result of my embassy in private. I replied, that I had only received a verbal answer: upon which he formed a pretext to send away the little girl, and made me give him a detailed account of all that had occurred.

"Well, well," he said, as I concluded, "it is all well. Be prepared to go out with me at six o'clock to-night, and get a spade and pick-axe privately from the garden."

I did not well know what to anticipate from these directions, for it was then in the early part of spring, and at six o'clock, the evening was too far advanced to afford anything like sufficient light for a fair single combat. Nevertheless, I had, of course, nothing to do but to obey; and, slipping out about half-past five, I got the tools from the garden; and after placing them in a spot where they were not likely to be observed, I returned to the library, where I was very soon joined by Monsieur de Villardin. His hat and cloak were already there, and I was just aiding him to put them on, when the groom, who had been despatched to Rennes, returned with a notary and the papers prepared for signature. By the calm way with which Monsieur de Villardin took this interruption, called for lights, heard the papers read, and went through all the necessary formalities for investing me with the property which he had bestowed upon me, I easily divined that he had no fixed appointment for that hour, and began to suspect the real object of his expedition. When all was concluded, and the notary sent back under a safe escort, he bade me follow him. We thus issued forth in the dusk; and, having furnished ourselves with the spade and pick-axe, proceeded a short distance on the road towards Rennes.

"Now, my young friend," he said, at length, "I must trust to your guidance. I have heard that you never forget spot, person, or thing that you once have seen. Do you think you can now lead me to the tree under which Monsieur de Mesnil's horse was tied, when you passed yesterday morning?"

"I think I can," I replied, "and, certainly, if not to the precise tree, I can lead you to the next one to it; for there were but two or three together, and I know the clump well."

When we reached the neighbourhood of the spot, the various objects around at once recalled to my remembrance which was the tree I sought; and, having approached it, Monsieur de Villardin measured out a space of ground beneath its branches about six feet by three, and, causing me to remove the turf in one piece, we both set vigorously to work, and, with pick-axe and spade, soon hollowed out a sufficient trench to contain the body of a man. "If I fall," he said, when we had concluded our work, "let it be remembered, that I wish this to be my grave. If I survive, I will direct you what to do."

Before leaving the spot, he caused me to carry about a dozen shovelfuls of the earth away, and cast them into the river, which flowed at the distance of three or four hundred yards. We then placed the tools in the grave, and returned to the château, Monsieur de Villardin directing me previously, to be up by five the next morning, to saddle his horse with my own hands, and, leaving it prepared in the stable, to go on to the spot where we had been working, and wait there for his coming.

The coolness with which he set about all his proceedings, and my knowledge of his skill as a swordsman, made me feel very confident that the issue of the combat would be in his favour, although his adversary was his junior by near twenty years. I had seen so much of such affairs, too, that I could generally form a very good guess in regard to the result; and, from all I had observed of Monsieur de Villardin's conduct during the day, I went to bed with very little fear for his safety the next morning. I was up at the time prescribed, saddled the horse as well as I could in utter darkness, and then walked away to the tree, which I reached just as the first faint gray of the morning began to mingle with the blackness of night.

When I had waited there about a quarter of an hour, I heard the sound of a horse's feet, and, a moment after, perceived Monsieur de Villardin, who sprang to the ground, and, giving me his rein to hold, only remarked that it was darker than he had expected; although, by this time, the dawn had made considerable progress. In about five minutes after, which he spent in selecting a piece of firm dry turf unencumbered by trees, and fitted, as far as possible, for the sort of morning's amusement in which he was going to exercise himself, the sound of another horse's feet was heard, and we were soon joined by the Count de Mesnil. He was quite alone; and, dismounting at a little distance, he bowed coldly to Monsieur de Villardin, saying, "As you requested, sir, I have come alone. You, I see, have brought your page."

"I did so, sir," replied the Duke, "in the first place, that he might hold our horses; in the next, that he might aid the survivor in filling up yon trench," and he pointed to the grave. "He is a boy of honour and of birth," he added, "and you may trust him fully; but, if you desire it, I will order him to withdraw."

"Not on my account," replied Monsieur de Mesnil; "I am just as well pleased that he should be present; though, I must say, that I should have thought the Duke de Villardin might have found some fitter person than a page to carry his cartel to the Count de Mesnil."

"I have chosen the method of proceeding I have followed, Monsieur de Mesnil, not only because I think these things between brave men had better always be done as quietly as possible, but also, because I judged it unnecessary that many witnesses should hear me tell you, as I now do, that I look upon you as a villain, a hypocrite, and a traitor, devoid of every good feeling but the brute quality of courage!"

"Enough, enough, sir," cried the Count de Mesnil: "the fewer of such words as well as the fewer witnesses the better. Where do you take your ground?"

He then gave me his horse's rein, and Monsieur de Villardin led him to the spot which he had chosen, made him examine it accurately, to see that there was no inequality or artifice, and then, drawing his sword, caused his adversary to measure it with the blade of his own, which proved to be nearly an inch longer. On perceiving this difference, the Count declared that he was perfectly willing to wait, if Monsieur de Villardin thought fit to send to the castle for a more equal weapon; but the Duke replied, that he was quite contented with the sword that he had; and, throwing away his cloak, hat, and coat, took his ground, and put himself in a posture of defence.

The Count de Mesnil prepared for the combat more slowly. He certainly evinced no fear; but there were two or three slight traits that I remarked in his conduct, which induced me to believe that, either from the consciousness of having wronged his friend, or from feeling himself inferior in skill and dexterity, he advanced not to the encounter with the same confidence as that which appeared in the whole demeanour of Monsieur de Villardin. When the Duke had first referred to the grave which we had dug the night before, and pointed it out with his hand, the eye of the young Count strained eagerly upon it for a moment, and it was evident that the anticipations the sight naturally called up were felt bitterly. He was pale, too, and though he spoke firmly and calmly, I perceived that there was a difficulty in unfastening his cloak, and all the other little preparations, which spoke a mind intensely occupied with other thoughts. I observed, also, and it seemed somewhat strange, that he in no degree referred to the cause of his present hostile opposition to a man who had been so lately his friend; and indeed it seemed that the few short lines which Monsieur de Villardin had written had been quite sufficient to explain all, and to make him feel that amity was changed for ever into unquenchable hate between them.

At length all was prepared, and the swords of the two combatants crossed. After a few parades on either part, which served no purpose but to let each know the skill and peculiar mode of fencing of his adversary, the assault assumed a more serious character; but still it appeared that both wished to maintain the defensive, and I plainly saw that, more than once, the Duke could have wounded or disarmed his opponent, had he thought fit. In a short time, however, the Count de Mesnil, who was of a hasty and passionate disposition, and not so old a soldier as Monsieur de Villardin, became heated in the encounter, and pressed his antagonist hard, still keeping a wary hand and eye, but evidently becoming more and more vehement at each pass. At length, in a furious lunge, by not keeping his right foot quite straight, and probably more accustomed to the salle d'armes than the green sward, he slipped, and came upon his knee, perfectly at the mercy of his adversary. But Monsieur de Villardin, to my surprise, dropped the point of his sword, bidding him rise.

"I do not take advantage of an accident, sir," he said. The Count rose, with downcast eyes and a burning cheek, and replied, after a moment's pause, "I cannot, of course, after this act of generosity, think——"

"If, sir," said Monsieur de Villardin, cutting him short, "you are contented to go forth into the world again as one who bears the name of villain, and hypocrite, and scoundrel—and, I shall then add, coward—mount your horse and begone:—if not, resume your place."

The Count's eyes flashed, and the combat was instantly renewed, but this time with a different result. At the end of four or five passes, with a movement so rapid that I could scarcely see how it was effected, though it may be believed I was an eager spectator, Monsieur de Villardin parried a lunge of his adversary in such a manner as to leave the whole of the Count's person open. He then lunged in return, and the next moment the Count de Mesnil was lying prostrate on the turf. At a sign from the Duke, I threw the bridles of the horses over a low bough, and ran up to the spot. The fallen man by that time had raised himself upon one arm, and with the other hand seemed grasping at the blades of grass; but he spoke not, and his head, drooping forward, concealed his countenance. "Shall I bring water?" I said; but, ere time was given for an answer, the strength which had enabled him to raise himself so far passed away, and with a single groan he fell back upon the ground and expired.

We stood and gazed upon his still, pale countenance for several minutes; but it was very evident, from the first look, that his career was at an end; and, after a pause, the Duke bent over him and opened his vest. Scarcely a drop of blood had flowed from the wound which caused his death, although, from the direction it had taken, it seemed to me that it must have pierced his heart.

"It is over!" said Monsieur de Villardin,—it is over! yet, put your hand upon his heart, my boy: see if it beats."

As I opened his shirt to do so, there dropped out a locket, which was suspended from his neck by a blue riband, and which contained a single lock of dark hair. As soon as he saw it the Duke caught it up, and, unfastening the riband, gazed upon the hair for a moment or two with an eager look. It was certainly the colour, to a very shade, of that of Madame de Villardin; and I instantly saw that the demon had taken possession of her husband once more. After gazing at the locket for several minutes he put it by, and then asked me, sternly, if the man were dead.

I replied that he certainly was, as far as I could discover. "Then now to our next task," said the Duke: "bring me yon mantle and coat."

I immediately obeyed, and bringing forward the clothes of the unhappy Count, I aided in wrapping the body therein; and then, taking the feet, while the Duke raised the head, we bore the corpse to the grave that we had dug, and laid it there, without prayer or benediction. We next placed the hat and sword of the deceased in the earth along with him; and then, as fast as possible, filled up the pit with mould. Notwithstanding the quantity of earth I had removed the night before, there was still more than enough to fill up the grave to the level of the other ground, and I had four or five shovelfuls more to carry down and cast into the river. When that was done, however, and the last spadeful had been disposed of, we laid the turf down again over the spot; and so carefully had it been removed, that though the ground was a little raised, it required some examination to discover where the aperture had been made.

"A few showers of rain," said the Duke, as he gazed upon the grave, "will remove every trace."

I replied nothing, but I thought that the rain of many years would never remove the traces of that morning's work from his heart or from my memory. In regard to the ground, however, I entertained no apprehension of its ever being discovered. The young Count himself, in tying his horse to that tree when he came on his furtive and evil visit to the dwelling of his friend, had of course selected one of the most retired spots that he could find; and it was only the accidental circumstance of my cutting across from the particular point of the high road where I had left Monsieur de Villardin on the way to Rennes, that had caused me to discover the charger in that situation. In that spot, too, the turf was short, and the grass anything but luxuriant; so that the shepherds were not likely to lead their flocks thither, at least, till the year was more advanced, by which time all traces of the grave would be effaced. The only thing now to dispose of was the horse; and after examining the ground carefully, in order to ascertain that nothing of any kind had been dropped or forgotten, the Duke directed me to lead the animal some distance in the way to the Count's own dwelling, and then turn him loose.

I did as he bade me, leaving Monsieur de Villardin to return to the castle alone; and, taking the horse by the bridle, I brought it to the vicinity of the road which led to Mesnil Moray, at a spot about half a mile from the bridge which crosses the Vilaine. There I gave it the rein; and, though it had followed as quietly as possible up to that moment, no sooner did it find itself free than it darted away as if it had suddenly become mad. It sprang at once over a fence, and crossed the high road, taking the direction of its lord's dwelling, without any regard to path. I climbed up a neighbouring bank to watch its course for an instant; and, to my surprise, saw it plunge into the river, and, after sinking down from the force with which it darted in, rise up again, swim the stream, spring up the bank, and gallop away across the fields.

There was something awful in the sight; and I could not help thinking, as the noble horse bounded away, that there was a living witness of the bloody scene in which I had just taken part, that, could he have found voice, would have soon called the friends of his fallen lord to avenge his death.

CHAPTER XIV.

Whatever the Duke himself might feel, I returned home gloomy from my share in the affair. I sincerely believed, indeed, that I had done nothing but my duty in informing him of the injury that the Count de Mesnil had striven to do him, and of the insult that had been offered to his wife. He, on his part, too, I firmly believe, imagined that he had done nothing but that which he was bound to do as a soldier and a man of honour; but still there was something in the whole affair—the solitary encounter—the grave prepared—the burial in unhallowed ground—which added to the event all those dark and awful associations that deprived us of the power of classing it with those common encounters, with which he and I were both too familiar to remember them with any great pain when they were over.

A little less than an hour had been consumed in the whole affair, at least on the part of the Duke, for I had been absent for a much longer space of time in leading away the horse of the deceased cavalier. However, as our household was not the most matutinal in the world, few of the servants were up, even when I returned; and I doubt not that no one in the whole family but myself had the slightest suspicion that the Duke had for a moment quitted his own dwelling. Thinking it right to make a report of what I had done after I had left him, I now went at once to the library, where I found him, in his robe de chambre, seated at a table, on which neither books nor papers were opened before him, but there lay the fatal locket which he had taken from the person of the Count de Mesnil, and his eyes were fixed steadfastly upon the lock of dark hair that it contained. He instantly took it up when I entered, and, of course, I ventured to make no observation, though I saw from his haggard look and frowning brow that he was once more adding the torments of suspicion to the pangs which the fatal business of that morning had left behind. He listened attentively to all I had to say, and though he gave a slight shudder when I mentioned the wild way in which the horse had dashed off towards Mesnil Moray, he made no farther comment, but waved me to leave him, saying he would speak with me more another time.

No injunction to secrecy had been laid upon me, but the Duke seemed to consider it perfectly unnecessary to enjoin me not to reveal the transactions of which I had been a witness, and in some of which I had borne a part As may be well conceived, I never dreamt of such a thing as babbling, and the matter lay buried as deep and as securely in my heart as it did in his own. Nobody noticed that I had been out earlier than usual, and consequently I was subjected to no questions; and the only single observation referring to the business which I ever heard in the family was when the head groom asked the Duke's permission to take his favourite horse to the farrier at Rennes, arguing that the animal was ill, from having found him that morning as heated as if he had come from a gallop.

The household of the Près Vallée were, indeed, amongst the last to hear the rumours and enquiries which soon began to spread concerning the Count de Mesnil. That some accident had happened to him became evident to his servants and retainers within a short time after his death had taken place; for although no one had remarked, with any particular attention, the fact of his having gone out at such an early hour unaccompanied, supposing him to be engaged in some love intrigue which did not court witnesses, yet when, in about two hours after, his horse, masterless and foaming, darted into the courtyard of the castle, it could no longer be doubted that the adventure of the morning had terminated ill for the Count. On examining the trappings and accoutrements of the horse, it was discovered that not only the girths but the saddle itself was drenched with water, and of course conjecture was led upon a new and a false train concerning the event that had occurred. Some, indeed, contended that the Count had been killed by robbers or assassins; but the greater part of his followers believed that, in attempting to swim the river, he had been washed out of the saddle and drowned. Information, however, was sent immediately to Rennes; all his relations had notice of what had taken place, and an immediate search and investigation was instituted to discover his body, and to ascertain the circumstances of his fate. A new light, however, was thrown upon the business when the papers of the unfortunate young nobleman were opened by the proper person. It was then found, by two documents which he had written on the night previous to the morning of his death, that he had anticipated such an event, and had made every disposition of his property accordingly. He referred not, however, in the slightest degree to the sort of danger which he apprehended; the cartel of Monsieur de Villardin, which had probably been couched in terms of bitter reproach, had been destroyed likewise; and, consequently, imagination had as wide a range as ever. Still some declared that he had purposely drowned himself, and certainly the state in which his horse had returned justified the searches which were made for his body in the river; but others more wildly contended—as he had taken a road which might, perhaps, have led him to the forest—that he had been murdered by the robbers who had so lately attacked and slain one of the royal couriers, with the three soldiers by whom he had been attended. New perquisitions were made in the forest. The whole country round about was searched without effect. Rumours, astonishment, exaggeration, and a thousand falsehoods and absurdities filled up the next six weeks, and then the whole gradually faded away, till the nine days' wonder was at an end, and the death of the young Count de Mesnil became a story to frighten children.

During the six weeks, however, that the fruitless investigations continued, gloom and darkness reigned over our dwelling. Deep and painful were evidently the feelings of the Duke de Villardin in regard to this event; and a thousand times, I am sure, did he regret that he had not pursued the usual mode of arranging such encounters, which would, at least, have spared him every accessary circumstance that now tormented him from day to day. As a friend of the dead nobleman, he was frequently consulted upon his affairs, and even in regard to the search for his body: and everyone thought that they were speaking upon a subject which must interest him, when they detailed to his ears any of the numerous absurdities that were current in the country concerning the death of the Count. All this was very terrible; but, besides all this, there were feelings in the heart of Monsieur de Villardin which aggravated the regrets consequent upon the deed which he had committed. He had known the young Count de Mesnil as a boy. He had known and loved his parents. He had seen him grow up their hope and joy. He had himself anticipated great things from his early promise, and yet his had been the hand thus early to lay him low in a bloody and an unknown grave.

Though sometimes he spoke to me upon the subject when we were perfectly alone, it was more from various little points in his conduct than from his own words that I discovered these feelings. So far from ever going near the spot where the death of the Count de Mesnil had taken place, he never, even when he could avoid it, rode in that direction, as if the very wind which blew from the grave wafted fresh reproaches to his heart. Even in riding to Rennes, the road to which city passed within half a mile of the spot, if he could possibly devise any excuse for so doing, he would take the most circuitous path, to avoid even coming in its neighbourhood.

Nevertheless, whenever he spoke with me upon the subject, he justified all that he had done, and declared, that were it to do over again, he would act exactly in the same manner. I saw, too, that unhappily there was another feeling in his bosom, which, while it rendered him more miserable than it is possible to describe, confirmed him in this impression—I mean the suspicions which had been freshly excited in regard to his wife, which, as the effect produced upon his mind by my report of her conversation with Monsieur de Mesnil died away, seemed to become stronger and stronger every hour. It was long, indeed, before he again spoke to me on the subject; but twice I saw him with the locket in his hand, and at other times his eye would rest on the dark tresses of Madame de Villardin, while I could see plainly that he was torturing his own heart by comparing them in shade and colour with the ringlet which that locket contained. A doubt also, more dreadful still, seemed to have taken possession of his mind; at least I argued so from the following circumstance.

From the various painful feelings connected with the Près Vallée, he had determined to change his residence for a time to the Château of Dumont; and he told me that he should despatch me thither before the rest of the family. The day previous to my departure he sent for me to speak with him in the saloon, in regard to various matters which were to be done before his arrival at Dumont. The Duchess and his little girl were both present; and, after he had concluded his directions, Madame de Villardin told me that if I would wait a few minutes she would bring me a billet for her old nurse, who inhabited the castle to which I was going. I was standing near a window behind the Duke, and when his wife arose, and proceeded towards her own room to write the note she had promised,—displaying, as she did so, that alteration in her figure which denoted her situation,—I saw the eye of her husband fix upon her with an intensity that seemed scarcely sane. Happily she did not perceive it, but walked slowly out of the room; and, as soon as she was gone, Monsieur de Villardin, who seemed to have forgot that there was anyone else present, caught his little girl in his arms, and kissed her repeatedly, murmuring,—"Thou at least art mine own."

He started when he remembered that I was there, and a quick flush came over his cheek; but the expression of deep grief, which, I feel sure, must have been upon my countenance, appeared instantly to calm him, and, laying his hand affectionately upon my shoulder, he said,—"Thou art a good youth. When thou hast got this note, go into the park and wait me there; I wish to speak with thee for some time."

As there is never any telling to what acts of madness or weakness, folly or meanness, a suspicious nature will not reduce a man, I was almost afraid that Monsieur de Villardin was desirous of examining the contents of his wife's note; and I felt not a little uneasy under the apprehension of his proposing to me to give it up to him. But in this I did him injustice; and when, after receiving the billet, I had gone out into the park, and he had joined me, he at once turned the conversation to matters entirely in the past. "From everything," he said, "that I have seen and heard, I am inclined, my boy, to put the fullest faith in all you say; and of this fact you cannot doubt, since upon your word alone I have risked my own life and taken that of another. There are, nevertheless, some circumstances of an extraordinary nature, which make me desirous that you should repeat, once more, the conversation which you overheard between Madame de Villardin and the unhappy young man who lies out yonder;" and he pointed with his hand in the direction of the spot where the Count de Mesnil was buried. "Tell me, then, exactly the whole truth," he added, "and fear not that anything you may say will agitate or affect me."

I willingly obeyed, for I well knew that impressions of good being never so lasting as impressions of evil, require reiteration; and, without varying a word, as far as my memory would serve me, I recapitulated exactly all that had passed between the Duchess and the Count de Mesnil, adding, at the same time, that the tone of scorn and contempt in which she spoke to him was more forcible than even her words.

"In riding past the house that day," demanded the Duke, "which side did you take?"

"The opposite side to the small saloon, my lord," I replied, very well understanding to what his question tended; "and as I came over the turf, and from among the trees,—which, if you remember the way I took, you will see I must have done,—it is perfectly impossible that any one in that side of the house could either have heard or have observed my return."

"But could they not hear you enter the library?" demanded the Duke.

"Impossible, my lord," I answered, "for the first door was open, and the second, as you know, makes no noise; besides, I saw the whole immediately, and Madame la Duchesse was speaking before I entered. It was only the end of what she said that I heard."

Monsieur de Villardin made no reply for some time, but pondered deeply over my words, gnawing his lip and knitting his brow. At length he spoke, but it seemed more to himself than to me that he addressed his words. "And yet, that he should possess a lock of her hair!" he said: "it is impossible!—there must be some deceit."

"Oh, my lord, it is not her hair," I cried; "depend upon it, there is some mistake."

"False boy!" he cried, turning angrily upon me, "it is her hair! There is no mistake! Have I not proved it by every test? Either you have been deceived or are deceiving. But, no! you are deceived, I believe. Leave me—leave me, sir!"

It may easily be conceived that I obeyed willingly, for there is but little use in reasoning with a madman, and such I looked upon Monsieur de Villardin to be, in the matter of jealousy at least. Returning to the castle, I occupied myself as usual; but the Duke did not come back for several hours, wandering about, as had been his custom lately, busied with solitary reveries which but served to foster the gloom and anxiety to which he was a prey.

The next morning, as I was to set out for Dumont before the breakfast-hour of the household, I descended about eight o'clock to the apartments of good old Jerome Laborde, whose affection for me had not decreased since I had rendered so many services to his nephew. I calculated, therefore, on finding a substantial meal prepared for me in his room; nor was I mistaken, for there it stood upon the table, consisting of everything qualified to fortify the eager and craving stomach of youth against the effects of a long journey.

"Thank you, thank you, good Jerome," I cried, at the sight; "thank you both for my breakfast, and for rising betimes in the morning to give it me, as I know you love not to be the first in the house to see the sun."

"Alack! young gentleman," he answered, with a mournful shake of the head, "although I have been up an hour, yet I am not by several the first that saw the sun this morning. My lord has been up since six. So has Gaspard de Belleville, and closeted with his master for an hour. So too has been that pert slut Suzette, my mistress's maid, and she too has been called to the conference. I fear all this bodes our poor lady no good, though God knows what my lord can find to be jealous of here, where she sees not a living soul but himself."

This intelligence did not serve as a very pleasant accompaniment to my breakfast. I saw at once how affairs were going, and easily divined that my lord, finding me so little disposed to pamper the jealousy, which, though it tore his very heart, was still his favourite passion, was inclined to take Gaspard into his confidence, very sure of finding all sort of compliance on his part. To him I had been, as it were, a blunt razor in the hands of a man who wished to cut his own throat; but Gaspard de Belleville was very well inclined, I believed, to prove the instrument of the wrong which his lord inflicted upon himself. From this new arrangement there was of course much to fear, as far as my personal favour with the Duke went; but, even under that mortification, it was no small consolation to me to think that Gaspard could do little to injure the poor Duchess. However malevolent might be his natural disposition, as far as I knew he had seen nothing which he could distort to evil purposes, and I also believed him to be too stupid to frame a story for himself, or to invent circumstances with such a regard to probability as would deceive even Monsieur de Villardin's willing credulity. What might proceed from the agency of the maid, Suzette, I could not tell. She was herself a bold, intriguing, saucy woman; suspected strongly by everyone of not being quite a Diana; but I believed that she really was attached to her mistress, and trusted to that attachment to vindicate the Duchess from all suspicion.

My fears, therefore, if I can call them fears, were chiefly confined to myself; and, although I may safely say—now that it is all past and over—that interested feelings had nothing to do with my apprehensions, yet it was most painful to me to think I might be supplanted in the affection and confidence of a nobleman, for whom, with all his faults and his weakness, I entertained a sincere affection.

"Well, Jerome," I said, after a moment's thought, "you are an old and faithful follower of Monsieur de Villardin. You see, as we all see, how miserable he is making himself about empty fancies and phantoms in the air. Depend upon it Gaspard is not likely to do him any good in these respects. Now it is your duty, surely, to strain every effort to counteract any evil that may be done."

"But how can I?—how can I, my dear young gentleman?" cried the old man: "I dare not speak to my lord on such subjects, unless he speaks to me."

"A few words well applied often do a good deal," replied I. "If the Duke hears his lady cried up by all his oldest and best servants and friends as what she really is—all that is good and virtuous—he will soon learn to think so too; and you may find many an opportunity of saying such words as, 'so good a lady as Madame'—'so virtuous a lady as the Duchess.'"

"Well, well; I will try, Seigneur Jean," replied the old man; "and depend upon one thing,—no one shall injure your interests with my lord while old Jerome Laborde is in the house. No, no; I will take care of them."

"Oh, I know I leave them in good hands," I replied, and ere we could say more the groom appeared to tell me that the horses were waiting. After receiving an affectionate embrace from the good old major-domo, I ran down into the court, and sprang upon my horse, without any further leave-taking, as I was not supposed to know that Monsieur de Villardin had yet risen.

CHAPTER XV.

Although I loved Monsieur de Villardin sincerely, and left my interest in his heart in a very precarious state; yet I acknowledge that I was delighted to ride away from the Près Vallée. Ever since the death of Monsieur de Mesnil, a gloom had fallen over the place, of which I could not divest it for a moment. These sensations would probably have worn away in a few days, although I began to think more seriously about human life than I formerly did, had not Monsieur de Villardin seemed to feel so deeply upon the subject himself. His regret and melancholy were a constant excitement to my own; and though, of course, the feelings that I experienced were far less poignant than his, and no other internal torment was added to the awful memories which oppressed me; yet the cloud that overcast his days shadowed mine also; and the sight of all the little traits which revealed how painfully he remembered the death of the Count, constantly recalled to my mind the share that I also had taken therein.

Besides this, my mind was fretted and annoyed at beholding continually the anxieties, suspicions, and cares to which Monsieur de Villardin made himself a prey; the destruction of an amiable woman's happiness, and the misery of a man I loved. I have said fretted and annoyed, because latterly a degree of impatience, which sometimes almost mastered my respect, had mingled with the grief that the sight of such a state of things had first occasioned in my bosom. From all these causes, my feelings, instead of being painful, were joyful in a high degree, on quitting the scenes which, a few months before, had appeared to me so beautiful and peaceful that I had fancied I could dwell in them for ever; and each mile as I rode on seemed to take more and more of the load from off my heart.

It was the morning of a bright and beautiful day in spring; and as I suppose that there are few people who do not feel themselves happier when the aspect of the world is cheerful around them, the pleasure I experienced in getting away from scenes of discomfort and pain was augmented by the warm sunshine and the clear sky. The thirst of novelty too, still fresh upon me, made me feel delighted with the journey; and the hope that this change in our dwelling would ultimately lead to a change in the general chain of events had no small share in the joy with which I set out. The truth was, that though I had certainly met with a sufficient stock of adventures since I had lived with Monsieur de Villardin to occupy my time abundantly, yet they had not been (if I except those which occurred during the first few weeks) of a kind that at all suited my disposition. Enterprise of almost any sort I liked and enjoyed; but the excitement which I had lately felt was of a sombre character, which saddened without satisfying—oppressed, but did not please me. Now, however, I anticipated other scenes and other pleasures; and though in truth I had not the slightest reason to suppose that any alteration would really take place, yet fancy can always supply abundance of materials for the architecture of hope; and as I journeyed on, I gave imagination full scope to work her will, in building up gay edifices in the distant prospect.

Nothing occurred to amuse or interest me in the course of my journey except the simple change of scenery; but as the country through which we passed was very beautiful, and the season one which shows off the loveliness of nature to the greatest advantage, what between fair objects flitting before my eyes as I rode along, and gay dreams rising up in my own bosom, the road did not seem long, nor the time tedious. It was night when we reached the Château of Dumont, and as the gossip of the one château had been, of course, regularly transmitted to the other, by the servants and messengers that were continually passing to and fro between them, I found that the two or three domestics by whom the house was at this time tenanted were prepared to receive me with every sort of deference and respect, having heard that I was an especial favourite with their lord, and that he had declared he regarded me as his own son.

The next morning, at breakfast, I was visited by the intendant, and delivered to him the letters with which I was charged, and which he proceeded to read in my presence. After asking me some explanations in regard to the Duke's will, on two or three points which did not appear very clear to him, he added, "Here is one letter, monsieur, referring to yourself alone, and as I suppose you are well acquainted with the contents, I have only to say that I shall be very happy to accompany you immediately."

I assured him, in reply, that I was perfectly ignorant of his meaning, as I had not been before aware that his lord had written anything concerning me at all.

"The Duke orders me here," said the intendant in reply, laying before me the letter he had just opened, "to put you in possession of the lands and houses of Juvigny, which, he says, he ceded to you by a deed of gift, about two months ago. If, therefore, you are inclined to take possession this morning, I shall have much pleasure in walking down with you, and formally making over to you the lands, as well as pointing out the boundaries of the farm and the dependencies thereunto attached."

It is not to be supposed that so young and new a proprietor as myself would be very unwilling to see and take possession of the first property he ever had in his life; and, thanking the intendant, whom I began to look upon as a very civil person indeed, I willingly agreed to accompany him to my territory of Juvigny. As the place itself and the road that conducted thither are memorable in my little history on many accounts, I must be permitted to describe that morning's walk, step by step, as we proceeded.

We set out, then, about half-past nine, and took our way across a broad terrace, which extended in front of the château, and which, at either extremity, sloped away into a fine road, broad enough for either horses or carriages. In front, however, it was supported by a perpendicular stone facing of about six feet high, at the bottom of which lay an extensive flower-garden, reached by a wide flight of ten steps; and beyond the garden again extended a fine park, laid out in walks and alleys, containing about three square miles of ground, on either side of a deep and rapid river, which, passing between high banks, took its way, through the midst of the estate, towards the sea, at which it arrived without mingling its waters with any other stream. Across this river the various paths with which the park was intersected were carried over a number of bridges, built in very good taste, some of stone and some of wood, as the character of the scene immediately around seemed to require. Over one of these, which consisted of a light wooden arch, the intendant and myself took our way, after having passed through the flower-garden and a considerable part of the park. This direction, I found, was followed in order to cut across a bend in the river; for, after issuing forth through a postern door into the country beyond the park, we again crossed the stream by another bridge, and proceeded along its course, pursuing a path which wound in and out through a scene of mingled rock and wood as wild and varied as ever I beheld.

As we proceeded along this road, which we followed for about half a mile, the intendant informed me that the little farm of which I was now the master had been bought by Monsieur de Villardin on the death of the last proprietor, lest it should at any time fall into the hands of people who might render its proximity to his park an annoyance to him. We soon after reached our boundary, and, having called at the Métairie, where I was formally introduced to the farmer and put in possession of my new property, we went round the limits, which were much more extensive than I had expected, and returned by the dwelling-house of the old lords of Juvigny, which consisted of a small feudal tower, with modern offices on the same scale, perched upon a high bank overhanging the water, and commanding a beautiful prospect down the valley through which the river wandered.

While the intendant was busy opening the door, which, from having had entirely its own way for several years, seemed very unwilling to give admission to a new lord, I asked the good farmer, who had followed us on our round, what was the extensive grey building which I observed about a quarter of a mile down on the other bank of the stream. He replied, in a patois which I could scarcely make out, that it was a convent of Ursuline nuns, to whom a great part of the ground on the opposite side of the river belonged.

I answered that I was glad to hear that I was to have such good neighbours; and, following the intendant, who had by this time opened the door, I was inducted into my house, which afforded a much greater promise of warmth and comfort in the inside than had been given by its external appearance.

The worthy intendant showed me over every part of it; and when he had done, he added, "You have now seen the whole of the estate, sir, which being—as I understand the Duke—conferred upon you in full, gives you every seigneural privilege, comprising droits de moulin, et de colombier, d'eau, et de four."

As I turned away quite satisfied with all these fine rights, of mill and dove-cot, water and oven, I observed a slight smile pass between the intendant and the farmer; and as I did not affect to observe it, the honest countryman explained it by a question which he asked my companion in one of those horse whispers which may be heard distinctly at a mile.

"Is he a boy really," asked the farmer, grinning, "or a little man?" The intendant made no reply, but enjoined silence by holding up one of his fingers; and, walking gravely after me, showed me the same deferential respect which he had formerly put on, and at which I could plainly see he had been laughing in his sleeve. I was nettled a good deal, I confess; for though I did not, in truth, feel myself at all what the world calls a boy, I had not the slightest wish to assume any station but that which was my due. At the same time I am well aware, and was so even at the time, that the habit of mingling with mankind, and the fact of having passed all my early years in gathering knowledge of the world instead of poring over grammars and dictionaries, had given a sort of decision and promptitude to my manners, which, coupled with my juvenile appearance, might well win for me the character of a conceited little fellow from those who saw no farther. However, as I have said, I was nettled at finding that the respect with which the intendant had been treating me, and which was rather suspicious from its profoundness, was nothing but a mockery; and had any occasion for venting my irritation occurred at the time, I might have done so with a vehemence which most probably would have amused him and rendered myself ridiculous. A little reflection, as we walked on, took the anger, and consequently the absurdity, out of my feelings; and remembering that it was very likely that the worthy intendant might attempt to treat me as a conceited boy in money matters also, I resolved to show him that I was fully aware of my own situation.

"Of course, Monsieur l'Intendant," said I, as we again entered the park, "you will continue to receive the rents of the farm, and pay them into the hands of Monsieur de Villardin; for though he has been kind enough to bestow it upon me I am well aware that my youth and inexperience of such matters utterly incapacitate me to manage it myself. I know, too, that, as a foreigner, I cannot exercise any of the rights you mentioned just now without higher permission, which, however, the Duke has already promised to solicit for me; and, doubtless, it will be granted long before I am qualified by age to make use of it."

The intendant opened his eyes half an inch wider at a discourse which, I am sure, he did not expect; and, as I thought over the business, I proceeded:—"One thing, however, I will ask you on my own account; which is, to seek me out a good tenant for the house and the field in which it stands; as the one is overgrown with weeds, and the other is very likely to get out of repair. But, at the same time, it is absolutely necessary that the tenant should be one who is agreeable to Monsieur de Villardin. If you can find such a person as I describe, who will be attentive to and careful of the place in which he dwells, the advantage of having the house kept from dilapidation will, of course, induce you to let him have the dwelling for a certain time without rent, and the land at the lowest value of the ground."

Whether the intendant did or did not conceive a better opinion of me from this discourse, I can hardly tell; for he was one of those men, so often met with, who, with an air of profound respect, have at the same time a slight smile hanging ever about the corners of their mouths' which casts a sneering expression over their whole countenance. I gave myself very little further care upon the subject, indeed; for though the people on whom nature or habit has inflicted such a look are always hated—because, without having a pretext for resenting it, we perceive that they are insulting us in their own hearts—yet he was always civil, and never afforded me the slightest pretence for anger, either by his demeanour or his actions. It was therefore, of course, my wisest policy to think as little as possible of what I could not remedy.

At the end of a week, Monsieur de Villardin and the whole household made their appearance; and the bustle of taking possession of their new abode concealed for the first day any changes that had occurred. When all the arrangements were over, however, I began to see a marked and unpleasant difference. Monsieur de Villardin was something more than grave and gloomy; he was abstracted, and at times fierce; and it was evident that the internal irritation of his feelings made him perceive subject of offence in things the most simple and harmless.

To me, he was certainly as kind as he could be; but still there was a difference there also. He often spoke to me gently, even affectionately, of my circumstances and my future prospects; treated me in most respects as his son: made me dine with himself and Madame de Villardin; but he never referred to the events which had taken place at the Près Vallée. I saw, too, that, on the excuse of not looking upon me any longer in the light of a page, but rather as one of his own family, the familiar intercourse which I had held with him was in a great degree denied to myself and permitted to another; and that Gaspard de Belleville was closeted with him for hours every day. Of course this did not please me; for although I trusted to my own conduct to maintain the good opinion of the Duke, yet, with the common weakness of human nature, I did not like that his confidence should be given to another, though it had often been painful to myself. I knew very well that my behaviour, though it might not have gratified his jealousy by admitting suspicions I believed to be false, would command his esteem more than that of Gaspard, who, probably, was more complacent—but who is there so strong and philosophic in heart, as to value esteem more than affection? I saw clearly, and I saw it with regret, that Monsieur de Villardin's love was likely to be given to him who pampered the weakness under which he laboured, rather than to him who tried to clear away suspicions, which, however detrimental to himself, were too firmly rooted to be eradicated without pain.

As some compensation, however, I found that my place in the regard of the Duchess was becoming higher each day; and as Monsieur de Villardin, on his arrival at Dumont, had desired me to attend upon her in her walks and drives, not as a page, but as her companion,—I was but fourteen, be it remembered,—and as her guard in case of danger, I had continually the means of cultivating her good opinion. Her spirits by this time were so depressed, that all the gay levity of manner which I had formerly remarked, was gone; and grave, sad, and thoughtful, she took her daily walk through the park, accompanied my myself and her little girl; sometimes endeavouring to amuse herself by talking to me of England, and of the scenes that I had gone through—sometimes moved to a smile at my boyish pranks with the beautiful child that ran on beside us—but still relapsing into melancholy the moment that the evanescent light was gone. Never by any chance did she refer to her husband's behaviour towards her; though once, when she seemed more than usually depressed, her words and her manner made me think she was going to do so.

"You have greatly won Monsieur de Villardin's confidence and esteem," she said, after some previous conversation during one of our walks; "and I very well perceive that hereafter that esteem will be much increased. Now, Monsieur Hall," she proceeded, speaking with a considerable degree of emotion, "I have a favour to ask you, and a promise to exact from you. Of course, no woman in my situation can count upon life for more than three or four months, with any degree of confidence. Should I die, then, in the course of the event which is to befall me,—which I think more than probable,—as you will grow up to manhood with my children, and possess their father's confidence, will you promise me to be to them as a brother, to defend them with your whole heart and strength, by hand and voice, against anyone that would wrong them; and never to forget to uphold their cause whenever you hear them assailed? Will you promise me this, upon your word of honour as a loyal Englishman and the son of a good soldier?"

"That I will, madam, and that I do," replied I: "even had you not asked it, I would have done so. But I now bind myself by everything I hold dear, in case—amongst the many changes of the world, which have laid my own hearth desolate, and given my father's house to strangers—they should ever require such weak aid as mine, I will give it to them with my whole heart and soul, and show as much zeal in their cause as if I were their brother."

I purposely made my promise as strong in point of language as I could devise, because I clearly saw, by the agitation of the Duchess while she spoke, that her husband's late conduct towards herself had excited in her bosom many a fearful apprehension in regard to the fate of her children. Hope, I have heard, will catch at straws; and certainly—though in the wide range of probability it was possible I might ultimately be able to render the services she required—there appeared but little likelihood of my assistance being of much avail; yet nevertheless my zealous promise seemed to relieve her mind greatly; and, as I made it, I saw the tears, which had been crowding to the gates of her eyes while she herself had spoken, now burst forth and roll over her cheeks.

"Thank you, thank you!" she replied: "I know that your promise will not be forgotten, and therefore I shall never mention the subject to you again, but rely in all confidence upon your word:" and so saying, she led the way back towards the château.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FORTNIGHT, or rather more, passed away in this unpleasant state; and I found that time, which reconciles one to most things, had not that effect at all in making me endure patiently the transfer of the Duke's confidence to Gaspard de Belleville. Had he been, indeed, a person who deserved that confidence, or who would not have abused it, although my vanity might have been as much pained, my reason would not have supported me in murmuring, nor would my affection for my lord himself have given additional pain to my personal mortification. As it was, however, I felt convinced, from what I knew of that youth's disposition, that he would not only do nothing to cure Monsieur de Villardin of his morbid suspicions, but that, both for the sake of maintaining his place in his master's favour, and of annoying me, he would do all that he could to foster any feelings which he might find out that I had opposed. When these thoughts came across my mind—not being of the most patient temper in the world, nor particularly scrupulous as to the means of gratifying it—I more than once thought of throwing my adversary over the bridge into the river; and as I had never yet done anything of the kind in my own private cause, though I had committed many a doubtful act in the cause of others, I endeavoured to reason myself into believing that such a proceeding was absolutely necessary to the peace of Monsieur and Madame de Villardin. This passed through my thoughts more than once, I acknowledge; and I imagined—if done fairly in single combat, strength against strength, without any surprise or feint on my part, and with full warning received by him—that the act I contemplated would be fully as justifiable as any duel that ever was fought. He, indeed, had the advantage of age, being certainly two years older than myself; though now, having grown considerably in the air of Brittany, I was as tall as he was, and nearly as muscular.

What all this would have ended in, Heaven only knows; and I am almost afraid to calculate now what would have been the profitable result; but two circumstances took place soon after my conversation with the Duchess, which I have detailed in the end of the last chapter, which put an end to all further thoughts upon the subject. The first was the arrival of a personage, who, on many points, changed all my ideas and opinions, gave me a new view of my duties, and both enlarged and purified my mind. The second was an accident which suddenly gave me a higher place than ever in the affection of Monsieur de Villardin, and established a link of connection between his heart and mine that neither years nor circumstances could ever break.

Let me speak of the events which followed, however, in the order in which they occurred. —Of old Jerome Laborde I had seen a good deal since his arrival from the Près Vallée; and, although he could give me no information as to the result of the conferences held between Monsieur de Villardin, his page, and the soubrette, he did not fail to point out that the change which had taken place was an evil one, and that all happiness was banished from our dwelling. The only thing, he said, which would ever restore it, would be the coming of good Père Ferdinand, his lord's confessor, who had more influence over his mind than anyone, and who had promised to come over and stay at Dumont for some time. I had caught a passing sight of the confessor more than once at the Près Vallée; and both from something prepossessing in his demeanour, and from the effect which his exhortations had produced upon Monsieur de Villardin on a former occasion, I argued in the same manner as good Jerome Laborde in regard to his next visit.

Various circumstances detained him, it appears, at Rennes for several days after this conversation; and the next time I saw the good major-domo was one day when, on suddenly entering the saloon, I found him speaking with the Duke, and, as it appeared to me, in an attitude of entreaty. I was about to draw back; but Monsieur de Villardin beckoned me forward, saying, "Come in, *Seigneur Jean*,"—the name by which he usually called me when in his milder mood,—"come in! Here is Jerome pleading to me in a matter which concerns you in a twofold degree. It seems that you have told the intendant to seek you tenants for your house at Juvigny, generously promising to let them rest rent free if they will keep the house in repair. Now, I find that Jerome has a nephew who is newly married, and who wants a dwelling, and he applies to me for my consent to his occupying this tenement of yours. Are you willing, Seigneur Jean?"

"Most willing, my lord," I replied, glad to give the old man any testimony of my regard: "I am sure Jerome would not recommend anyone who would not do full justice to all intrusted to him."

"By my faith! I am not so sure," answered the Duke. "You know more of this youth than I do; for it seems you saved him once from the gallows—a piece of business not very much to the credit of either. Besides, I may be accused, Jerome, of harbouring convicted felons."

"But, my lord, I can assure you," answered the old man, "he has obtained grace and pardon of the King, only coupled with the condition that he never sets foot in Paris again, nor ever attempts to exercise the business of a printer."

As may be well conceived, I was not a little surprised to find that my first tenant was likely to be poor Jacques Marlot; still more to hear that Jacques had taken unto his bosom a wife; and most of all, to find that a libel, which attacked the person and reputation of the Queen Regent herself, had been pardoned upon any consideration whatever. However, I, of course, joined my voice to that of good old Jerome Laborde, who, to tell the truth, promised and vowed a great deal more on the part of his nephew than I at all imagined his nephew would justify, assuring the Duke that all his follies were completely at an end, and that henceforth, he himself would answer for Jacques living a sober, tranquil, and peaceful life. Industrious and clever he always had been, he continued; and as the good ladies of St. Ursula, the old man said, were going to give him the management of their little farms, just opposite to Juvigny, the house would come quite apropos. Although with some difficulty, the Duke yielded to our solicitations, but solely on condition that Jacques produced to the eyes of the intendant the act of grace by which he was relieved from all danger of the royal indignation. Jerome willingly accepted of the terms; and I withdrew with him, in order to hear more of my worthy philosopher's fate, and the adventures which had brought about such a consummation as matrimony and the cultivation of the earth.

The major-domo, however, could tell me but little more than I had already heard. He had received, he said, a letter from his nephew that morning, dated from St. Aubin, entreating him to make the request he had just done to the Duke, and giving him satisfactory assurances that his pardon was really granted. How it had been obtained, Jerome added, remained to be explained to himself as well as to me; but respecting the farm of the Ursulines, and Jacques Marlot's knowledge of my plans in regard to Juvigny, an easy explanation was afforded, by the fact of his having just married a niece of our intendant's;—"A little against the intendant's stomach, I believe," said the major-domo; "but it was an old love affair, it seems, before Jacques went from Rennes—where he was in good business enough—to Paris, where he got bad business enough. But I have promised to open my own little store in his favour; so that that affair is all set right with Monsieur l'Intendant."

I now found that Jacques, with his wife and other movables, was to take possession of his new dwelling, if his uncle obtained it for him, in a few days; and as I could afford to bridle my curiosity for the intervening time, I left the good major-domo, and proceeded on my other affairs. These were of no great importance, and suffered little from being disturbed; but as the old man's own occupations were very numerous, and generally methodically arranged for all the hours of the day, I was somewhat surprised to see him enter my chamber towards nightfall, and seat himself as if prepared for no brief conversation.

After again thanking me for the fresh kindness I had shown his nephew, he said,—"But it was not on that subject I came to speak with you just now. You must know that Père Ferdinand arrived about an hour ago, and is even now in conversation with my lord. You will see him at supper; and doubtless my lord will introduce you to him, and will tell him all you have done. But I took the liberty, my son, of telling him all before, and also of letting him know how much you were attached to my lord, and how eager you were to promote the peace and happiness of all the family. Nay, more,—and I hope, and am sure, that you will not think I went too far,—I promised him that you should meet him this evening, after supper, in my apartment, and make his acquaintance more completely."

"Oh! I will willingly meet him," replied I; "though I suppose we should have had plenty of opportunities of making acquaintance during his stay in the château, without any appearance of secrecy."

"It need be no secret, my son," answered the major-domo; "and in regard to your making acquaintance with him afterwards, that would depend entirely upon circumstances; for he does not seem at all assured of staying even over to-morrow, till the conversation he is now holding with the Duke is at an end. I merely wish you to see him, because I think that, using both your efforts, you may do away much that is amiss in the house, and also because I am sure you will love and esteem him; for there never was a better man."

As old Jerome had anticipated, on entering the *salle à manger*, at the hour of supper, I found the Duke standing with the confessor, to whom he instantly introduced me, saying,—"Father Ferdinand, this is the young Englishman I mentioned, whom I look upon—if not as my own son, since such a feeling is, perhaps, impossible—at least as the son of a dear brother, and treat accordingly."

The confessor took my hand, and looked at me with a smile full of benignity, saying,—"We must be friends, my son; I hear a high character of you from all quarters."

I expressed, as well as I could, my willingness to meet his kindness; and as the Duchess was not well enough to appear that evening, we sat down to supper alone. I remarked that Monsieur de Villardin was more calm, though not less grave, than he had seemed of late; but it was the person and demeanour of the priest that principally engaged my attention.

He was a man considerably past the prime of life; and though his frame was neither bent nor broken by the weight of years, yet his age was to be traced in his thin, white hair, and in many a long, deep furrow on his brow and cheek. His eye, however, was bright and clear, and his teeth of as white an ivory as ever appeared between the lips of youthful beauty. He was thin and pale, but his complexion was clear, and, probably, had never been red; and his form, which was tall, was also upright and graceful, and in no degree stiff. His robes, too, sat well upon him, which is always a sign of a lofty education or of a fine mind; for no one can feel himself perfectly at his ease, in all his movements, without possessing the one, or having received the other. With Monsieur de Villardin, the confessor spoke as equal to equal; and though, from his demeanour, I might, perhaps, as a first impression, have inferred that he was one of those priests who so frequently govern, with absolute sway, the little kingdom of a private family, yet he was evidently not one of those who would truckle to the prejudices, or give indulgence to the errors, of anyone in whose dwelling he was established. There was in his whole conversation a tone of bold independence mingling with the tenderness of his manner, which took away from it the slightest appearance of subserviency, and made me feel that, in giving him the title of Father, one only addressed him by a name which he believed himself to deserve.

After supper I again retired, and, as I had promised, took my way to the apartments of the good major-domo, where the priest soon after made his appearance, and spoke with me for some time, kindly and frankly, upon a variety of indifferent subjects. He was evidently delighted to hear that my mother had been a Catholic, and that I had been originally brought up in that faith; but he pressed the subject no farther upon me, and I saw that he skilfully avoided saying one word that might make me suspicious of any design on his part, either to force himself into my own confidence, or to wring from me the secrets of others. Gradually, however, he brought the conversation round to the subject of Monsieur de Villardin, and spoke with deep and certainly sincere regret of the state to which the Duke appeared to have brought himself. He asked me no questions, however; but on my expressing equal pain at the fact, he only replied by exhorting me to strive, by every means in my power, to remove the poison from my friend's mind. I willingly promised to continue all my efforts, and our conference thus ended.

After what I have just said, it may seem extraordinary that my first impression of Father Ferdinand was not favourable. On retiring to my own chamber, I sat down to meditate over the character of the confessor, and, as usual, formed my judgment very rapidly. I was wrong, however—entirely wrong; for as yet I had only allowed myself to remark the worst—I may say, the sole bad—trait in Father Ferdinand's nature. On it, with the keenness which had been taught me from my youth, I pounced like a tiger, and resolved to be as wary as possible to guard myself against its effects. This evil spot, which I short-sightedly conceived to overspread the whole surface of his heart, though, indeed, it was but a small blemish therein, was a slight touch of that subtlety for which our priests are rather famous; but I must pause for a moment to define exactly its real limits, lest those who may read this writing fall into a like error with myself.

It was certainly a part of Father Ferdinand's doctrine that in churchmen the end justified the means, provided that the means were not absolutely immoral. Thus things that, under any other circumstances, he himself would have considered meannesses, lost that character in his eyes when they were employed to effect some good purpose; and art, duplicity, and cunning, used either in extracting the truth from others, or in guiding them, even against their will, upon the path he thought it right for them to follow, seemed to him not only admissible, but praiseworthy, in a priest. He stopped there, however, saying that no clergyman had a right to go farther; and that if, upon the pretence of guiding others, he did one act that was really sinful, the sin rested on himself, aggravated rather than palliated by the motive, inasmuch as it was insulting God to suppose that He could be served by sin.

On these principles, he made the character of all those with whom he was brought in contact his most minute study; employed every method of obtaining information concerning them, even to questioning their servants and their friends; and, having done so, proceeded, step by step, to establish his own influence over their minds, which it was only owing to the goodness of his own heart and the natural rectitude of his judgment, that he employed to their advantage and their peace. At first, however, he proceeded cautiously; suffered the traits of their hearts to develop themselves before his eyes; shocked none of their prejudices; rudely assailed none of their opinions till such time as he found himself secure of his power over their minds; but then, certainly, with an eloquence which I have never heard excelled, and a fervour rarely equalled, he would combat their errors, oppose their vices; and, once having begun the strife, would throw himself before their passions, in full career, and show them that they trampled on everything sacred if they pursued their onward course.

The consciousness of this ultimate purpose, too, gave a dignity even to acts that I cannot but imagine to be reprehensible; and even in the endeavour itself to elicit from dependents the secrets and character of their lord,—an occupation which surely is mean, if there be anything mean on earth,—there was an air of authority in his whole bearing, which made it seem more as if he were examining witnesses with the power and right of a judge than enquiring into the private history of others for objects of his own.

It is with regret that I have stated this blemish in a man I esteem and love, though no one will see these lines till both our eyes are closed, and his virtues will live remembered long after we both are dust. He himself, however, saw it not as a blemish; and were he now to behold the lines in which I have endeavoured to portray it in its true features he would very probably say that I had softened down one of the best traits of his character to suit my own prejudices; for he himself has always contended that the noblest victory he ever acquired over human weakness was that in which he conquered his natural repugnance to employ means which the world condemns and scorns, for the sake of effecting the best of purposes.

In all other respects my memory can rest upon every part of our acquaintance with pleasure; and, look into it as narrowly as I will, I find qualities in his character which I can admire and respect. In point of physical gifts, nature had originally been very bountiful to him indeed, and he had cultivated what she gave with extraordinary care. A fine ear for music and a rich, melodious voice gave full effect to a copiousness of words and a happy selection of epithets that could only be gained by long study; and clearness of thought—which is probably a natural faculty—was thus rendered doubly efficacious by immense power of expression.

But I must not dwell too long in description, which seldom does justice to its object. The next morning, in strolling through the park—a custom which my habits of early rising enabled me to indulge before the rest of the family were up,—I was joined by the Confessor, or, as he was generally called, the Directeur; and although, as I have said, I had already formed an erroneous opinion of his character, which led me to believe that any conversation between us was to be a game of chess, where it would behove me to be wary of all my moves; yet there was something so bland and pleasing in his very salutation, that I walked on with him, not ill-pleased with his company.

"I am glad to see you are an early riser, my son," he said, after wishing me good morning. "It is a practice which leads to many worldly advantages; and, where the mind is well disposed, may be turned to better purposes. There is a freshness, and a sublimity, and a calm monitory voice in the early morning which inspires purity of feeling, counsels good purposes for the ensuing day, and lifts the heart to adoration of the Being who made all the bright world that is wakening round us."

Whether he did it with that purpose or not I cannot tell, but certainly he could not have chosen a better method of breaking down all the barriers between us, which my examination of his character on the preceding night had raised up, than by thus showing me that there were finer thoughts and feelings in his heart than those which I had as yet discovered. After a few more words, however, in the same strain, he again brought the conversation to Monsieur de Villardin; and he now spoke of him in terms of tenderness and pity which he had restrained on the preceding night, while in the presence of the old domestic. Nor was it alone his sorrows he appeared to commiserate: he seemed to pity him more for his errors than even for his griefs. He spoke of him as of a being who, with noble powers and a generous heart, had, by a few weaknesses and faults, created for himself lasting misery below, and endangered his happiness for the long hereafter. There was something so eloquent, I may say so sublime, in the pouring forth of his lamentation over one who was evidently his friend as well as his penitent, that I was struck and affected; while all my prepossessions, I felt, were rapidly giving way to a truer estimate of my companion's character.

Seeing that I listened eagerly, and mistaking the cause of the surprise which was visible upon my countenance, he added, "You wonder to find me addressing you thus upon the subject of the Duke; but you must remember that I am his confessor, and know exactly how much you know of his affairs; what share you have had therein, and how you have borne yourself under difficult circumstances."

I replied not; for I began again to be upon my guard, fancying that all this might be but a prelude to questions which I might not think fit to answer. By my silence and the casting down of my eyes, he seemed at once to enter into my thoughts:—"Be not afraid, my son," he said, laying his hand upon my shoulder, with a smile; "I seek no information that you can give me. Indeed, what need I, knowing much more than you can know? Suffice it, that what I have heard of your conduct—making allowance for faults of education and habit—leads me to give you my esteem: and I trust that, even yet, with your good aid, I may be able to eradicate from the bosom of my noble friend the root of bitterness that poisons all the current of his days: and although a shadow from the past is, I am afraid, cast over his future for ever, yet we must try to soften it by the light of hope, which springs from repentance."

I doubted not that the priest alluded to the death of the Count de Mesnil; but it was neither my business to take it for granted that Monsieur de Villardin had confided that secret to him, nor did I see that the strong terms he used were very applicable to that event; for I could not get my mind to comprehend that the fact of killing an adversary in fair fight, though it might be a matter of personal regret, was at all a subject for religious repentance. I replied, therefore, generally, that, of course, he was the best judge of what his penitent had to atone for; but that, for my part, as both duty and affection prompted me, I was willing to strain every nerve to relieve the mind of Monsieur de Villardin, and to restore him to a happier state of feeling.

"I doubt you not, my son," replied he, seeing that there was still some holding back in my conversation with him, "I doubt you not, and trust that the time will soon come when you will not doubt me. In the meanwhile, to speak of another part of our subject, good old Laborde tells me that the page, Gaspard de Belleville, seems lately to have taken your place in the Duke's confidence. Your place in his esteem and affection he has not taken, as I positively know; and I would fain be sure of the fact that Jerome Laborde tells me before I speak with Monsieur de Villardin about it. Have you yourself remarked any difference?"

"So much so," I replied, "that many a painful feeling have I experienced on the subject. Indeed, I attribute the great increase of that evil which we all deplore to the fact of Monsieur de Villardin's now confiding entirely in persons who are likely to foster all his suspicions, and strengthen every wild idea that jealousy may suggest."

"And do you think that this Gaspard de Belleville is a person to do so?" demanded the priest.

"Beyond all doubt," I answered. "So sure am I, and so sure have I been, that such is the case, that, only yesterday, I contemplated bringing him to the middle of that bridge and throwing him over into the river, after giving him fair warning of my intention."

"My son!" exclaimed the confessor, recoiling with a look of involuntary horror; but the moment after he recovered himself, cast his eyes down upon the ground, and muttered a short prayer.

"Of course," I added, seeing the surprise painted on his countenance, "I did not propose to do so without giving him every fair equality. You did not suppose, I trust, Father, that I would take him by surprise?"

"God forbid, my son, that you should do such an act at all," replied the confessor: "the time will come when you will think better."

He said nothing more upon that subject, however, governing his own feelings with wonderful control; but, from that day forward, I seldom failed to meet with Father Ferdinand in some part of my morning's walk; and I saw that the words I had spoken with regard to Gaspard de Belleville had never been forgotten. Gently and cautiously, but firmly and perseveringly, he applied himself to change opinions and prejudices which my early habits had rendered almost a part of my nature. At first he would take an opportunity of descanting generally upon the value of human life, as the most precious gift of God; and, at various times, he put it in a thousand different points of view; each tending to show that it was an inestimable gift, which no creature had a right to take from another, except in those cases which God himself had pointed out. Now he represented it as the space allotted to a sinner for repentance; now as the means of conferring benefits on others,—rearing and supporting a family,—and doing the will of the Almighty. Now he showed it as the crowning and especial gift of God—a thing alike beyond man's comprehension and his efforts, which he could, indeed, take away, but which he could never restore. Now he would display the horrors that would oppress that man, who, on a supposed injury, had taken the life of another, if ever he were to discover that his passion or his judgment had deceived him, and that no injury had really been done, or that it had been attributed to an innocent person. Now he would carry his view beyond this world, and represent the agony that the murderer's soul must suffer, when, in addition to the weight of the crime itself, he felt loaded with all the unrepented sins which his hand had prevented his victim from atoning upon earth. Then, again, he would return and awaken every human sympathy: display the sweet ties broken, the dear hopes destroyed, the noble careers cut short, by such deeds: he would represent loves and affections that we know not of, bright but secret aspirations, joys and good deeds concealed from every eye, ended for ever, as the punishment of some trifling fault or idle folly; and, in the end, when he found that all my prejudices were shaken, he addressed himself direct to my own heart, with such powerful and eloquent exhortation, that thenceforth I mingled with the world with very different feelings in regard to the relationship between man and man.

CHAPTER XVII.

In speaking of Father Ferdinand, I have compressed into one view the effect which was produced upon my mind by many long interviews with him. These took place, as I have said, almost every morning; but in the meanwhile several events occurred to which I must now turn. A slight variation in our dull and somewhat painful course of life was afforded, about this time, both to good Jerome Laborde and myself, by the coming of Jacques Marlot and his bride to my house at Juvigny, and by the preparations which preceded his arrival. In these preparations, indeed, I did not share; but almost every day I perceived that good Jerome continued to absent himself from his duties at the château for a sufficient space of time to run down, through the park, to Juvigny; and many a time did I meet him, with gleesome satisfaction depicted on his countenance, returning from his expedition to his nephew's new dwelling.

As soon as I had learned that my friend Socrates had brought home his Xantippe, and was fairly in possession of his new abode, I asked the Duke permission to absent myself for an hour or two, and sallied forth to make him a visit of congratulation. I found him gazing forth from his door, with pleasure and content, at the prospect around him, having the farm which he was to cultivate for the good Ursulines just on the opposite side of the river, the convent itself within a quarter of a mile; and a little stone bridge, at half that distance, to render it easily accessible.

Madame la mariée was within, aided by a bustling big-nosed Bretonne servante, arranging the household gods; and Jacques Marlot himself had thus an opportunity, without any sacrifice of dignity in the eyes of his bride, to pour forth his joy and gratitude to John Marston Hall.

As he somewhat belaboured me with thanks for all sorts of kindnesses, past, present, and to come, I cut him as short as I could by demanding impatiently to see the bride.

"Ha! ha! my young lord and master," he exclaimed, "do not excite my jealousy within the first fortnight of my marriage; for I have but lately found out that you are an old friend and high favourite of my dear better half."

These tidings surprised me more, perhaps, than they might have done at a later period of my life; for at that time the extent of my female acquaintance was very limited, and perhaps the most decided fragment of my boyhood that then remained to me was a lingering dislike to the generality of female society, and a very juvenile contempt for women in general.

"Indeed!" exclaimed I, in reply to Jacques Marlot's information, "indeed! you make me but the more curious. Let me offer my adorations with all speed to the first of your household divinities."

"Well, well; enter, enter, by all means," he cried: "I am not made of jealous stuff, thank God; and, as our love has already lasted five long years, I trust it will not break short at matrimony."

I was now conducted in form into the house; and on the first floor we found the bride and her coadjutrix, when my surprise was still more excited, by beholding in Madame Marlot the pretty brunette whom I had seen at the inn near St. Aubin, on my first arrival in Brittany, and who had warned me of what was passing between her father and the groom who then accompanied me. After the first salutation, I returned her my thanks in set form, although I had nearly lost my life in consequence of her information; and I then enquired after her worthy and respectable father as tenderly as my conscience would permit me to do.

In reply, she informed me that her parent had most unjustly been suspected of having given information to the same band of robbers who had plundered me, that the courier for St. Malo was about to pass within their hospitable neighbourhood, on a certain day and hour; and that, in consequence, he had been arrested and thrown into prison, where, within one fortnight, he died, just as the authorities were about to liberate him, having become convinced of his innocence, and judging that a fortnight's imprisonment was a sufficient punishment for being suspected. The prisoner having thus liberated himself, his daughter was left, according to her own account, sole heiress of her father's wealth, which proved a burden less weighty than she had anticipated. She also found so many persons in this generous world willing to relieve her of it, that she saw very clearly it would soon be no burden at all; and therefore she set herself to consider what she might best do under such circumstances, when suddenly her ancient lover, Jacques Marlot, appeared one night at the inn, and presented her with an expedient that she did not fail to adopt.

In reply to this communication, I paid her my compliments upon her wisdom; and, as I found that the kind-hearted brunette and her bridegroom were both bent upon my staying to partake of their first dinner in their new dwelling, I yielded to my fate, and found that neither Jacques Marlot's taste for *friandise*, nor the skill which Madame had acquired in the kitchen of an inn, had abandoned them. During our meal, my philosopher gave me a sketch of his wandering life in the guise of a pedlar; and then related the means he had employed to obtain his pardon, which were ingenious enough. It appears that in France the presence of the King is always mercy, and that if he but set eyes upon a condemned criminal his punishment is remitted. Well knowing this fact, and trusting to his disguise, Jacques Marlot made his way towards Paris, and having heard that the King and court were about to make their public entrance into the capital on a certain day, he prepared to take advantage thereof to obtain his pardon. This plan succeeded to his wish. Bribing some of the guards at the palace with a considerable portion of what he had gained in his petty traffic, he placed himself in a spot where the royal party were sure to pass, in descending from their carriages; and, as the young King and the Queen came on together, he struggled forward to cast himself at their feet. One of the ushers, indeed, opposed his progress, and knocked the poor printer down to make him clear the way; but this only brought him literally to the King's knees; and the young monarch's first impulse was to stoop in order to raise him, reproving, at the same time, the usher for his violence.

Jacques Marlot rose no farther than his knees, however, and in that position besought pardon for his offences. It being now ascertained who the intruder really was, the guards were ordered by Mazarin to take him into custody; and poor Marlot was removed, trembling, as he acknowledged, for the consequences of his bold attempt. The rule, however, was suffered to prevail even in his case, although the Queen and the Cardinal were both exasperated in a high degree against the unfortunate printer. After remaining in one of the rooms of the palace for more than an hour, his pardon was brought him, but coupled with the condition that he should quit Paris immediately, never to return, and should never more exercise the trade of printing in any part of France. "And thus, my dear benefactor," he added, "I turned my steps hither, determined to become a new Cincinnatus, and, abandoning the government of Roman capitals, to dwell upon my farm and put my hand to the plough."

In such conversation we passed an hour or two very cheerfully; at the end of which time I took my leave, and left the pair to conclude their evening alone. It was now about two o'clock, on a fine April day; and, walking slowly along, I meditated over all the strange turns of that strange and unaccountable thing, fate, which, principally by the means of a complete stranger, had conducted the *ci-devant* printer in less than a year from the foot of the gallows to a peaceful retirement in a beautiful country.

On entering the park, I took the shady walk by the bank of the stream, both because the warmth of the day made a shelter from the sun not unpleasant, though the year was yet so young, and because I always had an indescribable pleasure in sauntering by a running water, and gazing upon the current gushing brightly by me. The banks here were irregular, sometimes high and overhanging, sometimes sloping softly down, and dipping their turf into the stream; and, as I often paused to gaze, and ponder, and revolve a number of sweet sunshiny dreams that were now very common to my mind, I was at least twice the length of time in the walk than I needed to have been.

Luckily did it happen that I was so. When I had got about half way to the château, I perceived that there were others in the walk besides myself; and, straining my eyes a little, I saw that it was Madame de Villardin, with a servant a step behind her, and her little girl running on before. The Duchess approached but slowly, with her fine eyes, as usual now, bent pensively upon the ground, and her hands, which were very beautiful, clasped together, and resting on her waist. The little girl, full of the joy and vivid life of youth, ran backwards and forwards before her mother, now gathering a flower, now peeping over at the stream, and receiving, from time to time, a grave caution from the soubrette, who walked behind, against approaching too near the water. As soon as she saw me, however, the little Laura had a new object of attention, and running along the walk like light, she came towards her playfellow. The impulse, however, was soon over; and, ere she had half reached me, she slackened her pace on hearing the voices of her father and the confessor in one of the other paths hard by, and was turning gaily to seek them, when an early butterfly started up from the bosom of a flower and caught her notice. The painted insect fluttered on before her with that sort of faint impotent flight which leads so many a child to follow on for miles, still hoping to catch it at every step. Eagerly she pursued, with her whole young soul beaming out of her beautiful eyes. For some way the butterfly flew on down the alley, and Laura de Villardin was close upon it; when, rising a little in the air, it turned its course towards the opposite bank of the river. With a bound forward, Mademoiselle de Villardin strove to catch it ere it escaped for ever, slipped her foot on the bank, and plunged over at once into the stream.

It is impossible to describe the three or four long thrilling shrieks that burst from the lips of Madame de Villardin as her child disappeared. For one instant they overpowered me; but the next I darted forward to the bank. Luckily the stream was flowing towards me, and, though deep and rapid, was smooth enough. I cannot remember the time when I could not swim, and the only difficulty was to discover the object of our search. The first plunge over had made her sink, and nothing appeared, as my eye ran along the river, but the flat glistening surface of the stream.

An instant after, however, the little girl rose again, and, with a faint cry, held out her arms at the distance of about twenty yards from me. I plunged in, with two or three strokes brought myself to the spot, and, finding that she had sunk again, dived down where I caught the gleaming of her clothes; and, throwing my left arm round her, shot up to the surface, holding her head above my own. By the convulsive grasp with which she seized my neck and hair, I found that she was still living; and the joy which that conviction gave me was indescribable, when, on rising above the water, I saw the scene that the bank presented. Madame de Villardin, on her knees, with her hands clasped, and eyes straining upon the spot where I had disappeared, was the first object that met my view; but a little nearer stood the Duke, called to the spot by the shrieks of his wife; while, with the frenzy of agony in his whole aspect, he was evidently only restrained from plunging over also by the firm grasp which the priest had laid upon his arm. Behind him appeared the form of Father Ferdinand, raising up his left hand with impressive energy; and I could not but think he was predicting I would save the child. The whole scene was made up by a number of servants running down towards the spot, together with the woody irregular banks, the bright green shades of the young leaves which clothed some of the trees, and the calm, bright sunshine, streaming cheerfully over all, as if there were no such things as danger, and terror, and care, and distress, in all the many scenes he looks upon.

A shout of joy, that made the banks echo again, burst from the spectators when we rose above the surface of the stream, especially when, by the ease with which my old habits of swimming enabled me to bear my little charge, they saw that she was placed beyond farther risk; and when a motion of her hand towards her father evinced that she was uninjured from that which had already occurred. All crowded round the spot to which I directed my course, and Monsieur de Villardin, stooping down as I approached, caught his child in his arms, and pressed her again and again to his heart. For some time Madame de Villardin wept in silence, holding one little hand of her rescued child, and kissing her fair cheek as she lay sobbing and agitated in her father's bosom. The priest looked on for a moment or two, without speaking; but then calling to their remembrance Him to whom their thanks were first due, he offered a short prayer of praise and gratitude in their name to the Almighty Giver of all good.

When this was concluded, Madame de Villardin besought her husband to give their little Laura into the hands of one of the servants, with orders to carry her to the château, lest, from the dripping state of her clothes, she might encounter a danger different from that which she had just escaped. Her father, however, would not part with her; but, so far following the suggestion, he himself carried her home, hurrying forward as fast as possible; while Madame de Villardin, with the rest, followed more slowly, her situation preventing her from accompanying her husband so rapidly. Her feelings were too intense for speech, and she proceeded in perfect silence; while the priest, who followed by my side, questioned me concerning all the circumstances which had attended the accident.

When we arrived at the castle, we were met by Monsieur de Villardin himself, leading his daughter by the hand, now clad in drier garments, and smiling as gaily as if nothing had happened. Such moments soften and expand the heart; and the Duke's first act was one which inspired bright but delusive hopes of better days in the bosom of more than one person present. He held his daughter up in his arms to embrace her mother, and then, taking the Duchess's hand, he pressed a kiss upon her cheek.

Without pretending to any fine feelings, I may truly say that I felt as glad as if some great benefit had fallen upon myself. His next act, however, was one which gave me gratification more entirely personal. The little Laura, having embraced her mother, turned to me, and as I bent over her to ask her how she was, she sprang into my arms and kissed my cheeks repeatedly, with all the warmth and sincerity of childish gratitude. Monsieur de Villardin smiled kindly upon us both; and the Duchess, who was again drowned in tears of joy, held out to me her hand, which I raised respectfully to my lips. We all now entered the château, and, although I was not very apt to fear wet clothes, I made the state of my dress an excuse for retiring to my chamber, feeling that the Duke and Duchess would be better left alone, together with their child, under the circumstances in which they were then placed. A couple of hours elapsed before I again saw any of the family; but, at the end of that time, one of the lacqueys entered my room, and informed me that Monsieur de Villardin desired to speak with me. I instantly followed, not doubting, certainly, that his intention was to thank me for the assistance I had rendered to his child; but not expecting, by any means, the deep and enthusiastic pouring forth of gratitude with which he now overwhelmed me.

He knew not, he said, how he could express his feelings towards me. If he had before looked upon me as a member of his own family, in what light could he now look upon me, when I had saved his child, the idol of his heart, from the death which so imminently threatened her? In conclusion, he again asked what he could do to testify his affection for me, and to express his thanks; and bade me point out myself any way which would prove most gratifying to myself, and he would instantly pursue it, did it involve the sacrifice of half his fortune.

"My lord," I replied, "I hope for nothing, I wish nothing, I will accept of nothing, for doing an act which is far more than repaid by seeing the happiness which it has given to yourself and your most excellent lady. Or, if I must ask a boon, it shall be alone, that you will, through life, give me the same place in your regard and affection that you do now, and let me share your love and confidence as long as we both live."

"That boon," replied the Duke, "was granted before you sought it. For never, of course, can I behold you in any other light than as the dearest and best beloved of my friends—nay, more, as a benefactor, though the benefits conferred are of a kind that I can never repay. You must think, therefore, of some other request; or, if you think of none now, let it stand over to the future, and I promise, whatever boon you then ask me, to grant you upon my honour."

"I do not think I shall have cause, my lord," I replied, "to call upon you to fulfil your word; but, as there is nothing that I either want or wish for at present, I can certainly ask nothing now."

"Well, then," he added, "let it remain for the future; but one thing I must myself do immediately, which I have heretofore forgotten: as I told you before, it will require a royal ordinance to put you, as a foreigner, in full and entire possession of your farm of Juvigny; and, as I stand not over well with the court, I was almost afraid that such a favour might be refused me, if I applied without some special reason, which I could assign for making over the property to you, I now can assign the noblest and the most valid of reasons, and I will at once write to the Prince de Condé, one of my best friends, entreating him to make immediate application to the court for such letters patent as may enable you hereafter and for ever to obtain and hold lands and lordships in France, as if you were a native subject of the realm."

I thanked him sincerely for all his kindness, and the letter to the Prince de Condé was immediately written and despatched by a special messenger, who, before three weeks were over, brought me back letters of naturalisation in all due form, and entitling me, John Marston Hall, *Sieur de Juvigny*,—a name which, afterwards, I occasionally adopted when circumstances required.

If, in the household of Monsieur de Villardin, there had before been anything wanting to my being considered and treated as one of his own family, such was no longer the case. Every day something new was done to contribute to my comfort and happiness. My time was left perfectly at my own disposal. A servant was selected peculiarly to attend upon me. A suite of handsome apartments were assigned me in one of the wings of the château. Two beautiful horses were presented to me for my own use; and no young cavalier, of the first quality, could have been better equipped in every respect than I now found myself. That which gratified me the most of all, however, was to find that Monsieur de Villardin now selected me continually for his companion; and, though but little conversation of a very private nature took place between us, yet I felt that, as far as his confidence went, Gaspard de Belleville was beneath my feet for ever.

From Father Ferdinand, too, I received a mark of affection and kindness, which, as I had now learned to appreciate his character properly, gratified me much. The apartments assigned me consisted of an ante-chamber, a little saloon, a bedroom, and a dressing-room; and I was surprised, on returning one morning, to see the carpenters, who were always more or less employed about the house, engaged in putting up a neat bookcase in my ante-room. This was followed by the arrival of two large packets of books from Rennes; and I soon after found the good priest busily employed in placing them in order. When the task was concluded, he begged me to accept them for his sake, and added, "I have had them placed here for you, because there are many leisure moments in every man's life which he is glad to employ in reading, if a book be at hand, when, probably, he would not take the trouble of going down to seek one out in a large library like that below."

When I came to examine the store that the good father had provided for my mind, I was both pleased and amused with his selection; and, indeed, it offered not a bad type of his own mind. The books were in general of anything but a heavy or very serious cast, though amongst them were to be found a number of volumes, in the pages of which a man disposed to seek for sound and wholesome ideas was sure to find them on every branch of morals or ethics. The generality, however, consisted of the best and purest poets in the language; of historians a considerable number; of romance writers a very few; but all were chosen evidently with a view to induce a habit of reading, and to lead the mind on to knowledge and virtue, by the pleasant path of entertainment.

The effect was such as the good priest could have wished and desired: as I was not naturally obstinate or perverse, the knowledge of his design led me rather to endeavour to accomplish than to defeat it. Although my taste for reading was, certainly, never so great as it might have been, yet the half hour that I snatched twice or thrice in the course of each day to peruse some of the volumes with which he had supplied me, carried me through a great number of the classical authors both in French and Latin, and gave me a taste for many things which I had before but little appreciated.

Owing both to new pursuits and feelings, my time did not now hang heavy on my hands; but it must be remarked also, that a renewed gleam of sunshine had fallen upon our dwelling, which made everything seem cheerful around. The burst of kindly emotions and tender feeling to which Monsieur de Villardin had given way, had proved more permanent than might have been expected. For several days before, the confessor had been labouring to free his mind from its delusions; and, although he had clung to his suspicions with all the tenacity of a jealous disposition, yet the calm, steadfast reasoning of the priest had, it appears—together with my former representations—produced a great effect; and it wanted but some little circumstance to wake the dormant affections of his heart, when the accident that befell his child occurred. The consequence, at the time, I have already noticed; and for several weeks the same mood continued. Everything assumed a new aspect, and to me especially, the whole scene was full of enjoyment.

Although the season was no longer one in which we could urge the chase, as we had formerly done at the Près Vallée, yet fishing and falconry, which was still a favourite sport in that part of Brittany, afforded us constant amusement; and, as I have said, I was ever by the side of Monsieur de Villardin, often his only follower, and always his most cherished companion. The only one in the house whom this change seemed really to oppress was my old enemy Gaspard de Belleville; and never did I set out with the Duke on any expedition of pleasure, but I caught a sight of his brow lowering upon us, evidently full of gloomy disappointment at seeing the new hold I had obtained of his master's affections. That he would struggle to regain them himself and endeavour to deprive me of the confidence and regard which he coveted, I did not at all doubt; but as I feared nothing for myself, and trusted that his power of injuring Madame de Villardin, at least in regard to the Count de Mesnil, was at an end, his hatred and malevolence were more a matter of mockery to me than anything else. It is difficult, however, to know when the fangs of a snake are drawn completely; and I had yet to learn what a base and malicious heart can accomplish, when it scruples at no means to serve its own sordid and ungenerous purpose. I thought it quite sufficient that I did not affect to triumph over him who was evidently my enemy, and that, without insulting him by anything like protection or condescension, I treated him with civility. I have sometimes, indeed, been sorry since that I did not pursue a different course, and even, by irritating him still more against myself, who could always defend myself, give a different direction to efforts which, without serving his own purpose, were but too fatal to the peace of others.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE calm continued for nearly a month; and though an occasional fit of gloom would fall upon Monsieur de Villardin, it disappeared on every occasion ere it had lasted many hours. So much, indeed, did the harmony of the family now seem restored, that Father Ferdinand, although he had agreed to fix his residence permanently in the house of his friend, took advantage of the tranquillity which he had so greatly tended to re-establish, in order to visit Rennes, and arrange his affairs in that city before he finally settled at Dumont.

The situation of Madame de Villardin, and her appearance, became every day more interesting; and although I could at times see a shade come over the countenance of her husband while, as he gazed upon her, some unworthy suspicion crossed his mind, yet, in general, he seemed to regard her with that increased tenderness and interest which every man must, or ought, to feel towards a being they love under such circumstances. The medical attendants of the Duchess had strongly enjoined her to take as much exercise on foot as possible; and, followed by a servant carrying a small garden seat, she continued her walks through the park, resting whenever she found herself tired, and proceeding again when she felt able. In many of these walks the Duke himself accompanied her, and still more frequently joined her at one of her halting places. All this bespoke renewed affection and confidence; and I too certainly hoped and believed that the demon which had caused so much unhappiness in our household was quelled for ever. Such was the state of affairs when one day, by the Duke's desire, I set out to visit Avranches and St. Malo, the latter of which places I had a strong desire to see. My little tour lasted four days; but nothing of any interest occurred in its course, except an accidental interview which I had at St. Malo with an acquaintance I certainly did not expect to see so soon again and in such a place. After having visited the port and perambulated such of the fortifications as I was permitted to see, I retired to the house of one of those aubergistes, whose hospitable dwellings are ever ready to receive the money of successful captains just returned from the sea; and there sitting down in the general receptacle of guests, I ordered my dinner, which was set before me by the servants with all the promptitude of men accustomed to deal with a hungry and impatient race.

Scarcely had I begun to eat when a gaily-dressed personage entered, and, placing himself nearly opposite to me, ordered his dinner also, in a tone of authority which was answered with due respect by the garçon, with, "Yes, captain—not a moment, captain—directly, captain." This new guest was a strong, square-built man, with a face that anyone would have unscrupulously pronounced a frank, open countenance; but, as soon as my eyes rested upon it,—although his whole garb and appearance was perfectly naval,—yet I thought that I had seen him filling the office of captain in the land service rather than the marine. He caught me gazing at him, and, as he did so, a slight frown curled his brow; but, as I did not usually respect frowns particularly, I only smiled in return, and proceeded tranquilly to the discussion of my dinner. Before I had proceeded far, however, my acquaintance seemed to have made up his mind as to his conduct; and, taking a moment when the room was full of different persons, he exclaimed, after fixing his eyes upon me for a moment, "I think, monsieur, I have had the honour of meeting you before?"

"I think so also," I replied, making an inclination of the head: "your face is familiar to me, though I really cannot tell where I have seen it."

"The same is my case," replied he, "in regard to you; but, at all events, you see that I have abandoned the profession of arms, which I followed till within the last six months, and have become a humble captain of a merchant vessel trading to the colonies."

"I admire the versatility of your talents," said I, assuming the same tone, though doubting greatly the truth of the tale he told me; "you must have acquired a knowledge of naval matters quickly; for now I remember, you were, when last I saw you, a very distinguished, active, and expeditious officer in the service to which you were then attached."

"Oh, monsieur, you are too flattering," he replied, "and, in regard to my versatility, too, do me more honour than I deserve; for, to tell the truth, I was originally brought up in the navy. You doubt me," he added, in a lower tone, "and perhaps doubt the whole story, but it is true nevertheless. I have, indeed," he continued aloud, "condescended to go into the merchant service, but it is only on condition that my ship be armed, and one of the finest on the water. I should be proud to show her to you, sir. We sail at high water, which will be in an hour; and if you will come with me to the port, you shall see us get under weigh."

I very well comprehended that it might not be quite agreeable to Captain Hubert, with whom I had made a somewhat interesting acquaintance in a certain forest near Rennes, to leave a person who knew his former pursuits so well as I did to walk unwatched through the town of St. Malo, at least till such time as he himself had fairly sailed; the merchant service, it appeared, being his real occupation at the present moment. To put his mind at ease, therefore, as it certainly never entered into my head to betray him, I agreed to walk with him to the port; and, after he had concluded his dinner, which was interrupted by the applications of half a dozen clerks, and twice the number of seamen, all proving that his tale was true, we turned our steps towards the spot where his vessel was lying.

Near the door of the auberge I saw the servant who had accompanied me thither, and whom I had left to take care of himself. I now, however, made him a sign to follow, and we thus proceeded to the port, which was crowded with people of all kinds, everyone busy on their own peculiar affairs, and seeming to think that there was nobody else in the world but themselves. Here the worthy captain pointed out to me his vessel, which, indeed, was of a goodly size, and apparently well armed; and it being now time that he should embark he gave me a friendly invitation to go with him and take a hasty view of the interior. This honour, however, I declined; and, playfully catching me by the collar, he declared I should go, pushing me at the same time towards his boat with an air of jest, but at the same time with sufficient force to hurry me on a step or two before I was aware. The spectators laughed at the good-humoured captain's badinage; but I, who had seen more of his jests than pleased me, laid my hand upon my dagger and beckoned the groom towards me, saying at the same time, "Let go my collar, my good sir, while the matter is a joke! You know I am hasty."

"Oh, if you take it in that light," replied the other, seeing the groom running up, "you are, of course, free to do as you like. But remember!" he added, in a low, deep voice. "Remember!"

"Pshaw!" I replied, in the same tone, "do not be afraid; I will not betray you."

"I trust you," he said; "I trust you," and springing into his boat, he was instantly rowed off to his ship, leaving me to congratulate myself on having escaped a trip to the colonies, where, most likely, I should have been treated more as the merchandise than the merchant.*

Amused with my adventure, I returned to my auberge, where I asked one or two questions concerning the worthy gentleman from whom I had just parted, and found, by the replies, that since our former rencontre in the forest he had already made one successful trip across the Atlantic, and had given every sort of satisfaction to the owners of his vessel. "All is well that ends well," I thought; but, however, it was no business of mine to interfere with a man's return to an honest profession, and therefore, of course, I held my peace concerning one, at least, of his previous occupations.

The next morning, at an early hour, I set off on my return to Dumont, pleased with my whole expedition, and trusting, foolishly, to find everything in the same state of tranquillity which had reigned there when I left it. As I rode on, and entered the park by the gates near Juvigny, all appeared sunshine and brightness, and there was an aspect of calm serenity about the whole place which rendered it almost impossible to conceive that it was the abode of anything but happiness. About half way up the avenue I perceived Monsieur de Villardin approaching towards me, with his arms crossed on his breast, and a sort of staggering, uncertain step, which seemed to me extraordinary. I immediately dismounted, and, giving the horse to the groom, advanced on foot to meet the Duke, who evidently saw me; but suddenly turning away, he took a path into one of the side alleys; and, seeing that he wished to be alone, I remounted my horse and rode on to the château. The first person I saw in the house was Gaspard de Belleville, who passed me in the vestibule with a sort of grin upon his countenance, which made me fear that matters were not going so well as I could wish; for I had remarked that his smiles were not, in general, the precursors of anything very pleasant to myself.

The feeling, indeed, that some disagreeable event had occurred was vague; but I had always found it the best plan to make instant enquiries into the situation of affairs around me as soon as ever I had the slightest suspicion that anything had gone amiss. Without even proceeding to my own apartments, therefore, I directed my steps at once to the room of my domestic oracle, the major-domo, and entered unannounced. The old man was busy with papers and accounts; but the moment he saw me he threw them down upon the table, and, lifting up his hands with an air of affliction, he exclaimed, "It has all gone wrong again, sir; it has all gone wrong."

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* In explanation of this expression of the worthy autobiographer, it may be necessary to remind the reader that numbers of persons were, about that time, kidnapped and sold as slaves in the various American colonies.

"Why, what, in Heaven's name, is the matter now, Jerome?" I demanded. "When I left you, all bade fair to continue tranquil and at peace."

"Ay! but there is some demon of mischief at work in the house," replied the old man, "whose machinations we don't understand. My lord is a thousand times worse than ever. Indeed, he hardly appears to me to be sane."

This news, as it may well be supposed, grieved me deeply; but, of course, my first thought was to discover the origin of the change that had taken place, in order, if possible, to counteract any evil that might have been produced either by accident or by design. "Tell me, good Jerome," I said, as the old man was going on with desultory lamentations and vague facts, "tell me exactly what has occurred since I went away, step by step, as nearly as you can remember it."

"Why, my son," he replied, "I have very little to tell, except what I have before said, that my lord seems nearly insane. However, let me see! The only thing that occurred worth noticing the day after you went away was, that, in returning from Juvigny, where I had been visiting my nephew, late in the evening, I found Master Gaspard and Madame Suzette, my lady's maid, in one of the alleys of the park, a great deal more intimate than I liked. I had seen something of the same kind before at the Près Vallée; and then, though I did not choose to show myself in the matter, I took good care that my lady should know what was going on; and I know that she scolded Suzette severely, and threatened to discharge her if she behaved so lightly. However, there they were again, walking along together, certainly more like two lovers than a page of good birth and a lady's tiring woman ought to be. Coming upon them suddenly, I passed by without their well seeing who I was; but I heard him say to her, speaking of someone else, 'Oh! he would take fire at it in a minute; anything of that kind would do very well.' This time I thought it my bounden duty to tell my lady myself what I had seen, and she was very angry indeed. The morning after that, as I was just going up the great staircase, I heard a terrible noise in my mistress's dressing-room, and the next moment my master passed me like a madman; while I saw Lise, the other maid, running out of my mistress's room as if for help. The moment she set eyes upon me she called me to come up and help her; and I found my mistress lying upon the floor of her dressing-room, as if she were dead; while beside her there was a large roll of bright blue riband, which seemed to have fallen out of her hand. While we were lifting her up to put her on the couch, my lord rushed in again, and, giving a glance at her as if she had been a viper, snatched up the riband, and left us to bring her to herself as we best could. She did not recover for some time; and I thought it but right to call the doctor, who kept her to her bed all that day. In the meanwhile I asked Lise to explain the cause of all this discomfort; and she told me that she knew but little, not having heard all that passed between my lady and my lord. When first she went into her mistress's dressing-room, she said, she found Suzette persuading her mistress to have her white mantle trimmed with that blue riband; and, though her mistress said it would look ugly, still she held it in her hand. In a minute or two afterwards Suzette went away, and the Duchess asked Lise whether she thought the riband would look well on the mantle. Just while they were speaking, in came my lord, and Lise went on into the bedroom beyond; but, in a moment after, she heard a word or two about the riband, and my lord gave my lady some hard names which she would not repeat. Hearing someone fall, she ran in, she said, to see, and found the Duchess as I have told you she was when I came there. Ever since that time my lord has been like one distracted; and though he saw his wife yesterday, he spoke not a word to her, but all the time he was in the room, he continued playing with the curls of Mademoiselle's hair, and thinking of something else."

Although I saw more deeply into the mystery than good old Jerome Laborde, and felt afraid, indeed, that he himself might unintentionally have contributed to bring about the change that we both deplored, yet there were many points of the whole business still dark and obscure even to myself. That the discovery of a riband in the hands of his wife, of the same colour, and probably the same shade, as that which suspended the locket to the neck of the unfortunate Count de Mesnil, had revived in the mind of Monsieur de Villardin, with more tremendous force than ever, those suspicions which the exhortations of Father Ferdinand and my own direct testimony to the Duchess's conduct had crushed with difficulty, I did not in the least doubt. Nor had I more hesitation in concluding that Gaspard's hatred of myself, and desire to supplant me in the confidence of Monsieur de Villardin, together with the offence which the Duchess's rebuke in regard to the page had given Suzette, were sufficient motives for the lovers, or paramours, or whatever they might be, to combine in fostering the suspicions of Monsieur de Villardin against his wife, and thus revenging themselves upon her while they rendered themselves agreeable to him. But how they came by the knowledge necessary to make such schemes effectual was, I confess, a wonder to me. Could Monsieur de Villardin, I asked myself, could he have been weak enough to confide in Gaspard de Belleville the secret of his encounter with the Count de Mesnil, and the discovery of the locket and its contents? or could either Gaspard or Suzette have watched our proceedings on that occasion, or have overheard any of the conversations relating to it, which had taken place between myself and the Duke? The first supposition I rejected at once, for it was impossible to believe that Monsieur de Villardin would trust to the ear of one whom he himself suspected of having betrayed his confidence in former instances, a secret which, from the concealment and privacy that had attended the duel, might, in all probability, involve his own life. Neither could I, in calling to mind with the most scrupulous accuracy every circumstance relating to the transaction, believe that we had either been watched, or that any of our words had been overheard. The spot where the duel had taken place was so remote and private, everything in the house had been so much in its usual train when we returned, that, certainly, no one could have followed us from the château to the place of combat; and any conversations that had taken place upon the subject afterwards had always been carried on in low tones, and in places where it was almost impossible that they could be overheard.

All this perplexed me greatly; and, although good Jerome Laborde pressed eagerly for my opinion, I could neither give him insight into the past, nor advice concerning the future. All that I could suggest was that, with the very first opportunity, he should send off notice of what had occurred to Father Ferdinand, who might boldly originate the subject in conversation with the Duke, without waiting till he was addressed upon it. This, of course, neither Jerome Laborde nor I dared attempt; though we naturally determined to do our best, should the occasion of serving the unhappy Duchess present itself.

The means of sending off speedily to Father Ferdinand were, luckily, found without difficulty; for, though we could not risk despatching a servant to him from the château, yet Jerome saw that another messenger might be procured by the intervention of Jacques Marlot.

Under these circumstances, I determined to write to the priest myself; and, having done so, I committed the letter to the hands of the good major-domo, who undertook that it should go, at the latest, the next morning. All this occupied some time, and it was now growing late; but yet the Duke had not returned. Another hour elapsed; supper-time arrived; and, although one of the most regular men in his habits that I ever saw, still Monsieur de Villardin did not appear. The whole household became alarmed; and Madame de Villardin herself, whom someone foolishly informed of the facts, gave herself completely up to terror; and, weeping bitterly, came down to the hall in order to send out people to seek for her husband. At that moment, however, Monsieur de Villardin's step was heard in the vestibule: and immediately afterwards he entered the hall.

He took but little notice of his wife, merely asking, "Why are you weeping, madam?" and after her reply, that she was apprehensive for his safety, he cast down his eyes and stood musing, in the middle of the hall, for two or three minutes, which seemed perfect ages to those who were the spectators of so painful a scene. Then, starting suddenly, he looked round frowningly upon myself and several of the servants who were gazing upon him in surprise and sorrow, and sat down to table unwashed, and in his dusty dress.

He seemed, however, by this time to have recovered some kind of command over his demeanour, and appeared eager to prevent the servants, whose astonishment he saw that he had excited, from remarking that there was anything in his behaviour different from his ordinary habits. He spoke to Madame de Villardin frequently during supper, to which she sat down with him, using, as he addressed her, all those forms of cold courtesy and politeness, which none knew better how to employ than himself. To me, also, he spoke once or twice concerning my late expedition; and evidently strove, with a desperate effort, to appear attentive to my replies. It was in vain, however, that he did so; for he continually relapsed into deep thought, every two or three minutes rousing himself violently from his reveries, and then falling back again, whether he would or not, into a state of dreary abstraction.

The next morning, a new change seemed to have taken place in his mood, for he came down perfectly himself, collected, and firm. He was quick and stern, it is true, but that was a frame of mind in which we had all often remarked him, and though there was now, perhaps, something more approaching towards fierceness in his manner than we had ever beheld, yet this demeanour was so much better than the state of the preceding evening, that it appeared a relief.

Several times during the course of the morning I hoped that he was going to speak to me on the subject of his new suspicions, for more than once he looked earnestly, I may call it wildly, in my face; and once, when he had done so during a longer space than ever, he suddenly broke off, and turned away, muttering, "No, no! myself alone!"

I eagerly watched his conduct to Madame de Villardin during dinner, and saw that it was certainly very different from that of the night before—keen and rapid, but no longer harsh and abstracted. Yet though the Duchess herself seemed delighted with the change, and did all she could to soften him still farther, there appeared to me something not natural in his manner, which alarmed me; and I determined to walk down to Juvigny in order to make sure that the letter had been despatched to Father Ferdinand, for whose coming I prayed more fervently than I had ever done for the presence of any other man in my life. The reply was satisfactory—a messenger having been sent off to Rennes at an early hour; and I felt certain, though it might be late the next day before the confessor could arrive, that he would not suffer two suns to rise ere he was in the château.

So far relieved was the mind of Madame de Villardin by the alteration in her husband's conduct, which she apparently trusted would now return to its ordinary course, that she began to resume her usual habits; and, accompanied by her little girl, took her stated walk in the cool of the evening; for it was now the month of May, and as warm as June. The Duke was shut up in his library all day, and, I supposed, alone; but in descending the back staircase,—which, leading from my apartments in the wing, passed one of the library doors, and thence to the court behind the château,—I encountered Suzette, the Duchess's woman, coming out from a conference with Monsieur de Villardin; and I felt sure, from that moment, that no internal change of feeling had taken place in his bosom, though he might assume, by a great effort, a different demeanour to those around him. To the hour of supper he was this night exact; and though his conversation was evidently forced, and, perhaps, a little rambling, yet it was fluent and courteous.

After supper, I, as usual, retired to my own apartments, and, full of painful thoughts turned to the window, and gazed out upon the park as it lay before me, sleeping in the calm moonlight. I had not been there a moment, when a figure appeared upon the terrace, which I instantly recognised as that of Monsieur de Villardin. With a quick and irregular pace he descended the flight of steps that led into the garden, crossed it towards the park, and in a minute after was lost to my view in one of the dark alleys. Never did I feel so tempted to play the spy; but, though I was conscious that the motive was not an evil one, yet my mind revolted from the thought, and, casting off my clothes, I went to bed.

The next morning and day passed much in the same manner; but, about half-an-hour before dusk, while Madame de Villardin was preparing for her evening walk, the Duke himself set out on foot before her, saying to his wife, as he left the saloon, in which I happened to be at the time, "As you are not going to take Laura with you to-night, if you come down the walk by the water side, I will meet you. Our young friend here will accompany you!"

Madame de Villardin's joy at these words almost overflowed at her eyes; and, though she had never said she was not about to take her little girl with her as the Duke implied, yet she determined to follow his words exactly, and, leaving Mademoiselle to play in the flower-garden, under the superintendence of Suzette, she set out about ten minutes after her husband, accompanied by myself alone. She walked but slowly, and rested about half-way down the walk; but although the sun was below the horizon, and the light was growing faint, yet the air was so warm and the sky so clear, one could have walked on for hours with far more pleasure than in the full glare of day.

Ere we had again proceeded a dozen yards, we saw Monsieur de Villardin come into the alley as if from the bank of the river; and, offering his arm to his wife, he took the garden-seat which I was carrying, and walked on down the alley in silence. A minute or two after, however, as we approached one of the little wooden bridges, he paused, and asked Madame de Villardin whether she was able to walk on a little farther on the other side of the river. "I have just now seen a wounded chevreuil," he said, "and wish to put it out of its agony;" and then turning to me, he bade me run back to the house, and bring his carbine, which I should find charged in his dressing-room.

His voice faltered, I observed, as he spoke, and the moment he had done, he turned towards the little bridge which might lie at about fifty or sixty yards from the spot where we stood. A feeling of awe and agitation came over me not to be described, for I had a sort of instant conviction that all was not right; and, though I took a few steps towards the château, I paused again almost immediately, not knowing how to act or what to do. Never in my existence did I feel such a painful state of uncertainty; and, gazing after Monsieur de Villardin and his fair wife, as they advanced slowly towards the bridge, my mind in a moment ran over a thousand vague apprehensions, probable and improbable, which only left the conviction that something fearful was about to occur, though of what nature I could not divine.

"His carbine!" I thought; "long before I can get back, it will be too dark for him to shoot anything thirty yards from him!" and I resolved to follow, and, pretending I had forgotten what he had said, to ask where the weapon was to be found. When I turned—though, as I have said, it was quite dusk—I could see the figures of Monsieur and Madame de Villardin approaching the river; and, walking fast to come up with them, I was within twenty yards of the bridge when they began to cross it. Scarcely, however, had they taken two steps upon the wood-work, when I heard a crash, a scream, a plunge, and both figures at once disappeared.

I darted forward to the spot where the bridge had stood, but nothing now remained of it but some broken fragments attached to the piles, which, driven into the high bank, had served as the foundation. The growing obscurity of the twilight, the trees that overhung the banks, the height of the banks themselves, which at that spot rose full twenty feet above the stream, the rushing and rippling of the current, which there, considerably confined by its bed, hurried on towards a sharp turn which it took about fifty yards below,—all served to prevent me seeing distinctly what were the objects on the surface of the water. Fragments of the bridge there certainly were; but I saw neither Madame de Villardin nor her husband, though the whirling of a part of the wood-work in one of the eddies of the river made me for a moment think I beheld the struggles of a living creature. I paused but for a single instant to calculate what were best to do; and then, seeing that there was nothing else to be done, I leapt from the high bank at once into the stream, and, as soon as I rose after the first plunge, I struck rapidly down the current, in order, by exceeding its own speed, to come up with whatever objects it was carrying down. Almost at the turn of the river, where the water, in circling round the point, drifted strongly against the bank, which was here again less steep, at least on one side, I saw, among some broken pieces of wood, a larger object, impeded in its course down the stream by some projecting stones and roots of trees, and the next moment I grasped the arm of Monsieur de Villardin. He seemed perfectly insensible; but, springing to the shore, I dragged him up the bank, and laid him upon the turf. Still he made no movement: but, as I confess, that from various feelings which I need not explain, I felt more interested in the fate of Madame de Villardin than even in his own, I left him at once, and, again plunging into the stream, I swam rapidly round the little peninsula I have mentioned.

The river here was more open, and whatever light was in the sky was reflected clearly from its bosom; but by this time all the fragments of the bridge had drifted out of sight, and, in vain lifting my head as high as I could, I attempted to discover any object floating upon the water. Still darting on as fast as my utmost efforts could impel me along the current, I endeavoured to regain the time lost in drawing Monsieur de Villardin on shore; and, after a moment, a faint and very distant cry for help caught my ear and encouraged me to strike on. The cry, however, was never repeated; and after swimming till I was perfectly exhausted, I was obliged to abandon the attempt in despair, and landed about a mile below the dwelling of good Jacques Marlot. Thither I directed my steps as fast as possible; and, finding the door locked, I knocked for several moments so violently as to bring him himself, with a face of terror, to the gateway. Telling him what had occurred, I besought him to rouse all the servants of the farm and the cotters in the neighbourhood, and, dividing into two parties, one on either bank, to search the whole course of the stream with torches and lanterns.

In the meanwhile I hurried back, and calling the woodcutter at the nearest gate of the park, made him hasten on with me to the spot where I had left Monsieur de Villardin, answering as well as I could the eager questions which he put to me, as we went, concerning the events which had occurred.

We found the Duke exactly where I had left him; but, though he had not moved in the slightest degree, it was evident that he was still alive, for he was breathing loud and hard, like a person in a deep sleep. Taking him up in our arms, we carried him as quickly as we could to the château, when we were instantly surrounded by the whole household; and by the lights which were now brought we perceived that a severe blow on the head was more probably the cause of his insensibility than the short time he had remained in the water.

Leaving him in the hands of the physician, who for the last month had inhabited the château, attending upon Madame de Villardin, I set out, with the greater part of the household, all furnished with torches; and for three hours continued our search for the body of the unhappy lady, from the spot where the bridge had broken to a village nearly six miles farther down the stream. Our search, however, was in vain; and all feeling that a good mistress, a kind friend, and a gentle lady was lost to us for ever, we returned sad and sorrowful to the château.

CHAPTER XIX.

The sound of our steps crossing the terrace was heard within the château as we returned from our ineffectual search; and, on entering the vestibule, the first object on which my eye fell was the form of Father Ferdinand, advancing to meet me. The natural clear brown of his complexion had now given way to a deadly paleness; and I saw by the haggard anxiety of the noble old man's eye, the tremulous eagerness of his lip, and the agitation that pervaded his whole frame, how deep and heartfelt was the interest which he took in the fate of those to whom he was attached.

"Have you found her?" he cried; "have you found her?"

A mournful silence was the only reply; and the priest, clasping his hand over his eyes, remained for a moment or two apparently in prayer. When the hand was withdrawn, however, it was clear that tears had mingled with his orisons; and, turning away from the gaze of the domestics, he took me by the hand and led me towards the library. There, closing the door, he cast himself into a seat, and gave way to a burst of feeling, which certainly did not lower him in my estimation.

"This is, indeed, terrible," he said, when he had somewhat recovered himself. "This is, indeed, most terrible; and even I, who am too well accustomed to witness scenes of death, and crime, and sorrow, am overpowered by this."

"Is Monsieur de Villardin dead, then?" I exclaimed, misunderstanding him. "Is he dead?"

"No, no," replied the priest, "he is still alive, and likely to live; but, I fear me," he added, "is likely to live only to wretchedness and remorse. Tell me! tell me, my son, how did all this happen? for it seems you were the only one present at the time this fatal catastrophe occurred."

To answer this question was more difficult than it would seem at first sight; for it required no small care to avoid mingling the dark suspicions that were in my own mind with the facts that I myself had seen, especially as I perceived that the priest himself entertained many doubts of the event which had occurred having been purely accidental. All that he could positively know, indeed, must have been obtained from such information as the physicians and the domestic had gleaned from the broken account I had given on first returning to the château, but it was evident to me that his own knowledge of foregone facts had led his mind to dark suspicions, for which he now sought, in his conversation with me, either confirmation or disproof. I replied, however, as cautiously as I could, telling him the simple facts as they had happened, but abstaining scrupulously from all remarks. My manner, beyond doubt, was embarrassed, for I would fain have spoken freely with the priest, and fully believed, even at the time, that I might do so without danger; but I imagined that I had no right to give utterance to the slightest unascertained particular, and therefore evinced a backwardness to explain more than was absolutely necessary, which he instantly remarked.

"Are you deceiving me, my son?" he asked, gravely.

"No, indeed, Father," I answered, "I am telling you the simple truth; but for reasons of my own you must let me do so without comment, and draw your own deductions from what you yourself know."

"Well, then," he said, after musing a moment, "you say that you were turning back to ask him where his carbine was placed, when you saw the accident that occurred. Tell me now, my son, did your never-failing memory and attention abandon you in the present instance; or had you not forgotten, in reality, where he had told you that the weapon was to be found?"

"I had not forgotten," I replied, "and only turned back with that excuse, because I did not wish to leave him just at that moment."

"Then you must have apprehended something," said the priest; "tell me what it was, and why you did so. You may do so safely, my son; for I pledge my word that your reply never passes my lips."

Thus pressed home, I replied, "Certainly I did apprehend something, good Father; but my apprehensions were quite vague and unformed, pointing to no particular object, and having no very definite cause."

"Then why did you entertain fears at all," demanded Father Ferdinand, "if you had seen nothing to excite them?"

"I had seen much to excite fears of every kind," I answered; "the whole demeanour of Monsieur de Villardin, his altered habits, his look, the fierceness of his manner, the wildness of his eye, all made me fear that he was hardly sane, and that surely was excuse sufficient for general apprehensions."

"It was," said the priest, "it was; and your conduct was so just and proper in writing to me at first, that I will not believe you conceal anything from me now."

"Father Ferdinand, I will tell you the truth," I rejoined, as he was about to proceed; "I conceal from you no fact of any kind; but I do retain in my own bosom all those deductions which I have made from the same events that I have detailed to you."

"It matters little," he said, "it matters little! The truth of all I shall soon know from this unhappy man, if ever he recover the use of his reason, and in the meantime I will draw my own conclusions."

"Has he been roused from the stupor into which he had fallen?" I asked.

"Completely," answered the confessor, "but he is now in a state of raving delirium, which is still more fearful. Of course, however, you are at liberty to go and see him; and I do not know that it will not be better for you and me, and old Jerome Laborde, with whom all secrets are safe, to take upon ourselves the entire tendance of the Duke during his illness, than to suffer others, on whose discretion we cannot rely, to wait upon him. Men in delirium often say fearful things, which, whether true or false,—whether the breakings-forth of long-suppressed remorse, or the mere dreamings of a disordered imagination—make deep impression on the hearers, and are often transmitted to others with all the evidence of truth. We had better, perhaps, watch him alone. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," I replied, "and will be guided in all things by your counsel, Father. Would that you had come before to direct us."

"Would I had! would I had!" replied the priest, sadly. "But it was impossible. I set out from Rennes as soon as I received your letter, and travelled even with far more haste than beseemed my age and my profession."

We now repaired to the chamber of Monsieur de Villardin, and made arrangements with the physician—in whom the confessor appeared to place full confidence—for carrying into execution what had been already proposed. It was at once determined that we should each watch six hours at a time by the couch of the sick man, whose ravings were certainly of a nature to be kept secret as far as possible. Now he would call upon the Count de Mesnil—now use harsh and cruel words, as if towards his wife—now speak of a cunningly devised scheme to end it all at once—now talk of a bloody grave beneath the oak; and, in short, he would let drop a thousand wild and whirling words, which, with all their incoherence, might very well have led to the discovery of much that he would willingly have concealed, and to the suspicion of other acts, of which, perhaps, he was innocent, though he never gave his mind time to remain long enough upon the fearful facts that busied it, to pour forth anything like a coherent tale in regard to either of them.

As the physician had now done his part, and as I bore on my face sufficient traces of fatigue and anxiety, the confessor took upon himself the first six hours' watch, saying, that while he sat up he would write to the uncle of Madame de Villardin, whose domains were situated in the Orleanois.

I certainly never remember to have been more fatigued, and willingly took advantage of the good priest's proposal. As I retired with the medical man, however, I asked him eagerly what was the state in which he had found the Duke when we brought him home; and, in reply, he explained to me that though his skull was not fractured, yet a severe concussion of the brain had taken place, from his head having struck, in the fall, either some projecting rock, or some piece of the broken bridge. From the ravings which had since come on, he feared, he said, that there was a tendency to inflammation; and on my pressing to know what would be the result, he shook his head doubtingly, saying, that the result was in the hands of God alone; he himself could not venture to give an opinion on the subject.

I did not sleep more than four or five hours, and, on rising, proceeded towards the apartments of Monsieur de Villardin, in order to take my place by his bedside. I found old Jerome Laborde already there, however; who, having been made aware of the arrangements of the preceding night, had come about half-an-hour before to relieve the priest. By this time the Duke had fallen into a quiet sleep, from which I augured well; and leaving the old major-domo to hold out his watch, I descended to the saloon, feeling most oppressively that deep and shadowy gloom which always seems to fall over a house where such a sudden and fatal event has taken place as that which distinguished the foregoing evening. The low voice in which everyone spoke when they met, the stealthy pace with which everyone moved about the mansion, the stillness which pervaded the whole place, expressed the sense of awe that was felt by every bosom, and had something awful in itself.

All this struck me much as I descended the stairs; but, on entering the saloon, there was something more painful still to be encountered. The little Laura de Villardin was playing near one of the windows with some trinkets of her mother's, but the moment I entered she ran up to me with open arms, and holding up her fair face towards me, exclaimed, "Oh! tell me—tell me, where is mamma? Suzette says she is dead, and I shall never see her again. What does *dead* mean? Where is she gone to?"

It was impossible to hear such questions calmly; and, for the first time since my father's death, I wept like a child. Suzette herself now entered the saloon, and, for a moment, her eyes and mine met. Whether what I felt towards her was very visibly expressed in my glance or not, I cannot tell, but she turned extremely red, and, casting down her eyes, caught the little girl by the arm and drew her rudely out of the room. In truth, I was not sorry to be spared more questions; and, taking my hat, I walked forth into the park.

The morning was as warm and bright as that of the preceding day; and a feeling of painful curiosity impelled me directly towards the spot where the accident had occurred on the night before. I followed the exact path which I had pursued with Madame de Villardin, and as I turned from the lateral alley where we had met the Duke, into the short path which led to the broken bridge, I suddenly saw the form of Father Ferdinand standing at the very point to which I was directing my steps. He turned round as I approached, and, without any apparent surprise, beckoned me towards him. I walked on at once; and, for two or three minutes after I had come up, we stood gazing together in silence upon all that remained of the wooden arch which had there spanned across the river, and which I myself had passed over on horseback not five days before. Very little of it was now to be seen, for full twelve feet of the centre had fallen into the river and had been carried away; but enough still remained attached to the piles at the sides to show, in some degree, the manner of the accident, though not the cause. The nails which had fixed the cross supports to the rafters had either given way, or had been drawn out; and the two main beams which upheld the whole having been deprived of everything that strengthened them, had broken at the side nearest the château, and—dragged down by their own weight from the piles on the other bank of the river—had fallen with the rest of the wood-work into the current, and been carried away.

A part, however, of one of them remained, as I have said, attached to the side where we stood; and, after contemplating the whole for some time in silence, the priest laid his hand upon my arm, as he saw my eyes fixed upon the broken beams, and he asked, in a tone half stern, half sorrowful, "Do you remark nothing there, my son?"

I stooped down and looked more closely, but still kept silence; and he added, "Then I will ask you, in plainer terms, do you not perceive the marks of a saw?"

"I am afraid I do," replied I, rising up.

"It is enough," he said, and with his foot pushed the fragments of the beams over into the water, which was easily accomplished, as all that held them had already been nearly wrenched out by the breaking down of the rest of the bridge. Father Ferdinand and myself gazed at each other for several moments with sad and bitter hearts, and then, feeling that nothing more need be said between us, we each turned on our way without another word. Father Ferdinand took the path back to the château, but I walked on towards Juvigny, in the sad hope of hearing from good Jacques Marlot that the body of Madame de Villardin had been found. On my arrival, however, I learned that Madame Marlot herself, who, it seems, was in a delicate situation, had been so agitated and alarmed by all the disturbance and anxiety of the preceding night, as to be obliged to keep her bed that morning; and the large-nosed Bretonne servante, who gave me these tidings, added, that her master was gone over to the gate of the convent, and that I should certainly meet him there if I walked that way.

I did as she suggested, and met Jacques Marlot returning from the convent; but he informed me that no trace had been discovered of the body of Madame de Villardin: and, as his wife was ill, I turned back towards the château. As I passed by the bridge again, I found Gaspard de Belleville, and one or two of the servants, examining the spot where the fatal event had occurred; and it was not difficult for me to perceive, that the whole household looked upon the page and myself as irreconcilable enemies, by the manner in which the servants drew away from his side when I approached. As I had most scrupulously avoided mentioning even his name to anyone when not absolutely called upon to do so, it must have been from Gaspard himself that the domestics had learned that any degree of enmity existed between us. At all events, their having discovered the fact was by no means to his advantage; for as my good-will was of more value in the family than his, from the circumstances in which I stood in regard to the Duke, my favour was of course more courted,—and it often happened that it was courted at his expense.

As I wished to be asked no questions upon the subject, I passed on, without noticing anyone, and after an hour or two spent in the melancholy rooms of the château, I went to take the place of good Jerome Laborde. While I watched by Monsieur de Villardin, he woke from the sleep into which he had fallen; but so far from my anticipations of amendment being realized, he appeared infinitely more delirious than ever. His words, however, were now so incoherent and wild, that the most suspicious ear could have drawn no meaning from them; and thus luckily they continued through the rest of his illness. For nearly a fortnight he remained in the same condition, but at the end of that period a material change for the better began to manifest itself, and the ravings to which he had been subject ceased entirely; though, by this time, he was reduced to a state of infant weakness.

Innumerable visitors had presented themselves at the château, as the tidings spread through the country; and all who could hope to obtain anything by his death were most assiduous and tender in their enquiries. Shortly before he recovered his reason, also, the Count de Loris, the uncle of his late wife—warned of Madame de Villardin's death by a letter from Father Ferdinand, with whom he was well acquainted—appeared at the château, and took up his abode there for the time; but as he had never heard of any dissensions between his niece and her husband, and care was taken not to make him aware of the painful state in which they had lived for the last five or six months, the good old Count expressed, and, I believe, felt as much anxiety in regard to Monsieur de Villardin as if he had been his own son. His manners were simple and kind to all around him, and when informed by Father Ferdinand of the share I had borne in several of the late events, he embraced me tenderly, and, after thanking me repeatedly, made me relate every particular in regard to the accident which had befallen his unhappy niece. The warm tears coursed each other down his cheeks as I proceeded, and when I had ended, he said, "If ever I can serve you, young gentleman, let me know. I am a man of few words, but I mean what I say."

I gave him full credit for doing so, and I only did him justice. After the delirium had left Monsieur de Villardin, his health continued to improve every hour; but still it was the most painful convalescence that ever I beheld. He scarcely spoke a word to anyone, and his eyes roamed round those that surrounded his bed with a searching and anxious glance, that was terrible to those who understood the feelings in which it arose. When he began to speak again, it was but one word at a time, and even then he confined himself to the name of any object that he wanted at the moment.

As soon as the physician judged it prudent, Monsieur de Loris was brought into his bedchamber, and took his hand affectionately; but the Duke turned his head away, and pressed his eyes upon the pillow, as if to avoid the sight and all its concomitant ideas. The good old Count went on to comfort him in a kindly tone, but not knowing the truth, he followed the most painful track he could pursue, and by addressing a man who had destroyed his own happiness as he would have done one who suffered alone under the bereaving hand of fate, he poured gall and wormwood into all the consolations he offered.

The shock, however, though terrible, was not without a good effect, for it seemed to rouse the unhappy Duke from the dull despair that overwhelmed him, and, at all events, it broke the first dreadful feelings of returning to scenes which had each its own peculiar associations of agony to pour forth upon him.

Still, the day that he first came forth from his own chamber was full of misery. The sun was shining through all the windows, checkering the staircases and saloons with gay and gladsome light. Under the directions of Father Ferdinand, everything had been removed which had peculiarly belonged to the Duchess, and alterations had been made, in various ways, to break in every direction the chain of associations which we knew could alone prove painful. Monsieur de Villardin's eye, however, still wandered wildly over every object around, and I do not know that it was not really more distressing to him to miss all the objects he expected to see, than it would have been to find them in their accustomed places.

I heard him mutter to himself, "They are all gone! they are all gone!" and sinking into the fauteuil in which he had been accustomed to sit when in the saloon, he covered his eyes with his hands, and remained musing for several minutes. At that moment the door of the room was gently opened, and Mademoiselle de Villardin, warned and persuaded by every means in our power to be careful of what she said and did, was led in by Monsieur de Loris. The Duke heard the door open, and withdrawing his hand from his eyes, saw his child for the first time since the death of her mother. He had scarcely been able to reach the saloon with the assistance of two people, but when his eyes fell upon his daughter, he started up without aid, sprang forward, and catching her to his heart, burst into a passionate fit of tears.

Father Ferdinand and myself supported him to a seat, but still he held his little girl in his arms, and weeping bitterly, every now and then drew back her head from his bosom to gaze upon her face, which that day bore—or seemed to me to bear—a more striking likeness to her mother than ever I had before remarked. She on her part was silent, but wept too, mingling the tears with which she bedewed her father's bosom with kisses pressed upon his cheek. The physician would fain have put an end to such a scene, but when he proposed to remove the young lady, the Duke turned round, saying mildly but firmly, "She must remain! It does me good!"

I believe most sincerely that it did, and certainly from that moment his health improved much more rapidly than it had previously done. Each day he regained strength, and gradually, by walking out upon the terrace, and driving forth in a carriage, he acquired sufficient vigour to mount his horse, and thenceforward might be considered well, at least in body.

It was necessary, indeed, that he should recover strength, for there were still many painful things to do which could not be much longer postponed. M. de Loris had now been nearly a month at the château, and was of course anxious to return to his own dwelling; yet, as his niece had brought to Monsieur de Villardin, at her marriage, an estate called Virmont, in the Orleanois, which had been settled upon her with all the peculiar forms and agreements that enter into a French marriage contract, it became necessary to make some arrangements in regard to this property, which of course reverted entirely to her daughter. M. de Loris felt that to speak long upon such a subject would be inflicting much pain upon both the Duke and himself, and therefore he had procrastinated for some days, when suddenly, one morning, as we were driving out in the neighbourhood, Monsieur de Villardin, who had been agitated by the same feelings, began the conversation himself, and concluded it in fewer words than it otherwise would have required.

"Monsieur de Loris," he said, with a degree of calmness which showed how he had tutored his mind to the point, "I have long thought of speaking to you in regard to Virmont. Although, of course, I am my beloved child's only guardian and protector, yet, under present circumstances, I do not choose to hold the property which is now hers any longer, even as her guardian. It is contiguous to your own land, and I have therefore to request that you would kindly take charge of it, manage the rents, invest them to the best advantage, and make the whole over to Laura when she marries or becomes of age."

The Count made some opposition, although he acknowledged that the confidence of the Duke was highly grateful and flattering to him.

Monsieur de Villardin sighed deeply, but replied, "You must, my dear Count, allow me to have my will in this respect. Accept the trust, I beseech you; and as we may all feel very sure that my remaining years will be few, I have named you in some papers that I drew up yesterday for a still more important charge, which I must entreat you to undertake. It is that of one of the guardians to my child when I am dead."

The reply was such as might be expected, but the conversation ended in Monsieur de Loris accepting both the offices which Monsieur de Villardin put upon him. A few days after the necessary papers were brought, drawn up in legal form, and having been read in silence by both parties, were duly signed. The next morning the Count de Loris left us, pouring upon Monsieur de Villardin expressions of affection and esteem, everyone of which went home to his heart like a dagger. The Duke seemed relieved when he was gone; but there seemed still another painful task to be performed; at least, I judged so from the anxious expression of his eyes, as he sometimes turned them upon the face of the confessor.

At length, one morning, after walking for half an hour upon the terrace, he turned to Father Ferdinand, who, at the moment, was coming forth into the garden to take his customary stroll with me, and said, "Now, good Father, I am ready, if you can do me the favour."

"It is one that must never be refused, my son," replied the priest; "I follow you:" and they turned towards the château. Both had become somewhat paler as they spoke; and in about two hours afterwards I was joined by the priest, with a countenance on which strong and terrible emotions had left traces which could not be mistaken. He tried to appear calm, indeed, and succeeded in a certain degree, by speaking for some time of indifferent things. At length, when he had obtained command of himself, he said, "In the letter which you wrote to me when I was at Rennes, and which brought me so suddenly back to the château, you said, my son, that you really doubted the sanity of Monsieur de Villardin, from the extraordinary change that had come over him. Now tell me truly, I beseech you, was that an expression hazarded without attaching to it its full meaning, or was it your real conviction at the time that the mind of your friend was unhealthily affected? It is of much consequence that I should know."

"I will tell you, my good Father, most sincerely," I replied, seeing that the feelings of the confessor were in truth most deeply interested; "indeed I will give you an answer that will show you I speak without reserve. Did I not believe, then, that, during the four or five days preceding the dreadful accident which lately happened, the mind of Monsieur de Villardin was decidedly deranged, I would not stay in his house another hour."

"It is enough, my son, it is enough," replied the priest. "So thinks the physician,—and so he thinks himself," added the confessor, in a lower tone; giving what he said more the appearance of a reflection addressed to himself than to me. "And yet," he continued, "his mind must have been dreadfully worked upon by others; at least, it would seem so, from all that I can hear in the house."

"The more reason, Father," I replied, "for supposing that their irritating suggestions had affected his brain. People seldom go mad without some cause, unless they are very madly disposed indeed."

The priest mused; and, after a long pause, he replied, "Well, well, let us always lean to the side of charity. We are all too fallible to judge rigidly."

I saw that the fear of approaching, even in the slightest degree, the facts which had been confided to him under the seal of confession, prevented Father Ferdinand from speaking with me more candidly upon a subject which occupied so great a part in the thoughts of both at that time. Of course I did not press the topic, and the conversation turned to other matters.

What I had said to him was nevertheless true; for certainly, had I not believed that, for several days before the death of Madame de Villardin, the Duke himself had been positively insane, I would, without hesitation, have restored to him all his gifts, and would have quitted for ever a man to whom I could not help attaching, in my own mind, the darkest of suspicions. But his whole previous conduct had so firmly impressed me with the idea, that at no period between my return from St. Malo and the death of his unhappy wife, had he possessed the complete command of his own reason, that I felt him to be more an object of pity than of censure. Even more —regarding his conduct in this light, and looking upon him as one whose happiness had been cast away for ever, under the influence of mental disease, all that had occurred proved a strong, though mournful tie, which bound me to him more firmly than ever; and, when I remembered the promise which I had so shortly before made to this unhappy lady who was now no more, I determined that no time nor circumstances should ever induce me to quit entirely the child that she had left, till I saw her hand given to someone who would have the right and power to protect her. I say that my determination was not to quit her *entirely*, because the conduct of Monsieur de Villardin towards me, since his recovery, had been such that I knew not whether he either desired my longer abode with him, or whether it was to be upon such terms as I could now alone endure.

Although no son could have attended upon a father with more care and anxiety than I had done upon him, yet he had scarcely addressed ten words to me since his convalescence began. Those that he had spoken, indeed, had always been kind and affectionate; and I had often caught his eyes fixed upon me with a look of intense interest,—mournful, perhaps painful, but still full of regard and feeling. Nevertheless, the strangeness of his silence, which I ought to have attributed to other causes, made me anxious and unhappy; and, as I was not a person to express any of that loud indignation for ill-requited kindness, which is sure to pile contempt upon ingratitude, I frequently thought of asking his permission, calmly and tranquilly, but firmly and urgently, to return to Paris, and to mingle in the scenes of strife and turmoil which were again beginning to agitate the unquiet capital of France.

I was saved, however, from the pain which such a request would have occasioned to us both. On the day following that in the course of which I had reason to believe he had relieved his bosom of the load that weighed upon his heart, and had poured forth both his sorrows and his faults to the ears of the confessor, he beckoned me immediately after breakfast towards his library, and led the way thither himself. I followed, and closed the door; and as soon as I had done so, he put his hand upon my shoulder, and gazing in my face with an expression of deep grief, he said, "Why—why, my dear boy, did you save my life?—why—why did you preserve me to daily sorrow and continual regret?"

Although I was seldom destitute of a reply, his question might have been a painful one to answer, had not my conversations with Father Ferdinand given me altogether a new view of human life from that which I had formerly entertained.

"My lord," I answered boldly, "every man, I have heard, has something to repent of in this world, and it is always better to have time here, where repentance avails us, than to go where it is a punishment instead of a penance."

"You say true,—you say true," replied the Duke, "and I thank you for the life you have preserved, as well as for the kindness and the courage which prompted and enabled you to preserve it." He paused for a moment thoughtfully, and then proceeded: "You have thought me cold, unkind, ungrateful, since I have recovered life and health; but it has not been so. I have felt all that you have done for me; I have seen all that you have felt for me; and I have a thousand times longed to thank you for the whole; but ever, when I was about to speak, all the horrible memories which are in your heart and in mine, have risen up before me, and compelled me to silence. I have scarcely had courage even to address you, much less to speak with you on subjects connected with the terrible past."

Such an explanation was more than sufficient, and the pain of it once over, all further difficulty or reserve between us was at an end. He spoke some time longer with me in the library; and though he alluded but vaguely and remotely to the past, yet he did speak of it more than once with that sort of lingering tendency which a man always has to return, in conversation with others, to any subject that occupies all his thoughts when alone. At length, taking a key from the table, he said, "I have a fearful task before me, but one which I promised to execute myself. Nevertheless, I confess my heart so plays the coward with me, that I am afraid to enter those rooms alone. You must go with me, at least, as far as the ante-room, and wait for me there till my task is concluded."

Although he did not mention what rooms he meant, yet as I had heard from the old majordomo that Father Ferdinand had, with his own hands, closed and sealed the apartments of Madame de Villardin immediately after his arrival at the château, I easily divined that it was to those chambers that the Duke now alluded. I instantly prepared to follow, but still ventured to ask whether he had not better desire the good priest to accompany him in the sad duty he was about to perform.

He shook his head gloomily, and replied, "No, no, I must go alone;" and then, with a pale cheek and wavering steps, took his way up the great staircase. His hand shook so fearfully that he could scarcely remove the seal, and turn the key in the lock of Madame de Villardin's chamber door; and sitting down in the ante-room he paused for several minutes, in order to gain strength for the undertaking. At length he started up abruptly, exclaiming, "Now!" and entering her bedroom, which communicated with a dressing-room on the other side, he closed the door behind him. Full of sad thoughts, I stood gazing out of the lattice for some time; but at the end of about a quarter of an hour, I heard the ante-room door open, and turning my head round without any noise, perceived Madame Suzette stealing quietly in, and looking about her. As soon as she perceived me she halted; and, with as much abhorrence as ever I felt towards any loathsome reptile in my life, I walked forward, and taking her by the arm, turned her quietly but firmly towards the door.

Thinking, probably, that I was there alone, she seemed about to take some noisy notice of my unceremonious ejection of her pretty person; but, pointing sternly towards the bed-chamber, I whispered, "The Duke is there;" and, glad to get off unobserved, she tripped away as quietly and speedily as possible. I kept my silent and now undisturbed watch in the ante-room for nearly two hours, and all seemed so still and quiet within the chamber beyond, that I began at length to feel alarmed lest the excitement and agitation which Monsieur de Villardin had evidently experienced when he entered, should have overpowered him in the course of his undertaking.

He came forth, however, just as I was about to open the door, and was evidently calmer and more firm than when he had left me, though I should say that the expression of deep, stern grief, which had now become habitual to his countenance, was, if anything, a shade deeper than before.

"Did I not hear another step than yours about an hour ago?" were the first words he spoke. I replied in the affirmative, and told him at once who it was that had intruded. He looked at me for a moment or two with a sort of enquiring glance, as if he sought to read something in my heart ere he himself spoke.

"Suzette!" he said, thoughtfully; "I have been thinking of keeping her here to take charge of Laura."

My feelings burst forth whether I would or not, and I exclaimed, "What! give the care of the daughter to her who calumniated the mother!"

The retort was so sudden and so unexpected that the Duke started; and gazed at me for a moment, with a look in which I thought I could trace no slight anger at my rash exclamation. I had spoken the truth, however, though I had spoken it too boldly and unadvisedly, and I was not to be abashed while such a conviction was at my heart; but casting down my eyes, I waited calmly for the rebuke that I doubted not was to follow. But Monsieur de Villardin paused, and for several moments uttered not a word; till at length, grasping my arm, he said, in a low but emphatic tone,—

"However you made the discovery, young man, you say true. She did calumniate her mistress! For though there is still much to be accounted for, which, probably, will never in this world receive an explanation, yet I were worse than base to doubt the proofs of virtue and of love with which those cabinets have furnished me. I heap coals of fire upon my own head by yielding to the conviction; I inflict the tortures of hell already on my heart by making the acknowledgment; but I own before you, who probably have seen more deeply into my weakness and my madness than any human being, that I did that beloved girl false and shameful wrong, and that from my soul I believe her—now that it is too late—to have been as pure as purity itself!"

He trembled as he spoke with the very energy of his feelings, though every tone was as low as a lover's whisper, and when he had concluded he sank down into a seat, and gazed at vacancy, giving way, I am sure, to all that longing, burning thirst to recall the past, which everyone at some time feels amidst the errors and the faults of life.

It was long ere he recovered himself; but when he did so he called my attention to a letter that he held in his hand, saying that it concerned me as well as himself. The handwriting was that of Madame de Villardin, and the epistle covered two sheets of paper, one of which he gave me to peruse, after having made an ineffectual effort to read it to me himself. I remember the contents almost word for word, and put down here that part which most interested me at the time.

"I mean not to reproach you, my Lord," it went on, after a broken sentence at the top of the page, "far, far from it; and I only thus assert my innocence of even one evil thought; I only thus attempt to prove that I could not have been guilty; I only thus depict all that I have suffered, in order that you may love our children when I am dead, and grant me, in dying, a few not very burdensome requests. I repeat again, that without knowing why, I am convinced that I shall not survive many months. Nor does this conviction arise in the common terror of women in my present situation. On the contrary, I fear not to die; and now that I am deprived of your affection, I have nothing to attach me to the world but the dear child that we both love, and the one which is yet unborn. Still I feel that death is not far from me; and therefore these lines, which will never meet your eye till I am dead, may well be looked upon as my dying words. Oh then, my Lord, I beseech you to love the children that I leave you with tender and equal affection; and should a regret at any time cross your mind for sorrows inflicted on their mother, make me atonement by your affection for them. If ever the spirits of the dead be permitted to watch over those they loved while living, my soul shall follow you and our children through existence, and every kind word or deed towards them shall be received as wiping away some unmerited reproach or some harsh act towards myself.

"My next request is, that you would yourself confirm and sanction an engagement which I caused the young Englishman, who has since saved our daughter from a watery grave, to enter into in regard to our children. Your fate, my Lord, is, of course, uncertain; and how long you may be permitted to guard and protect them no one can tell. I have heard much of this young gentleman and his history, both from yourself and from others, and I have myself seen that he is always prompt to succour and defend, and that his knowledge of the world, in all its changes and disguises, is extraordinary for one so young. As it is more than probable that he will grow up with our children as an elder brother, I have made him promise that he will never wholly leave them, but will always come forward to give them aid and assistance, wherever you may be, whenever they may need his help. In making this request to him I felt sure that I could not be doing wrong, as the person whom I besought to undertake the task, and whom I entreated, while you acted towards my children as a father, to act towards them as a brother, is one in whom you yourself seem to place the fullest confidence; but I have since been confirmed in what I have done by the opinion of our excellent friend and spiritual guide, Father Ferdinand, who not only assures me that this young gentleman's goodness of heart and rectitude of judgment may be depended on, but undertakes boldly that in case of my death you shall sanction my conduct, induce him to repeat his promise, and give him every opportunity of executing it, both during your life and after your death.

"My requests, I think, are now all made, except that you would bestow upon my servants the sums which I have written down upon the paper attached to this letter, and that you would assign to the convent of Ursulines at Juvigny the thousand crowns of revenue which, with your consent, I promised them on the birth of our daughter, and which has never been formally made over to them. Besides this, I trust that you will give a thousand livres to the church of St. Peter at Rennes, to be expended in masses for my soul; and as my last request, I beseech you to think of me kindly, and when I am dead, to do that justice to my memory which you have not done to my faith and honour while living."

I could well conceive, as I read these words, how poignantly they must have gone home to the heart of Monsieur de Villardin; and even as I read them in silence before him, I could see from his eye,—which was fixed upon my face, scanning its expression from line to line,—that he again mentally ran over all which that paper contained, and inflicted on his own heart every gentle word as the most severe of punishments.

"Do you undertake the task?" he demanded, when I had done.

"I have already done so, my Lord," I replied, "and I never forget my word."

"Your task may become a strange and a difficult one," he said, musing; "but never mind," he added, abruptly, and at the same time rising, "whatever comes of it, so it shall be. I on my part promise, before heaven and before you, on my hope of pardon, and on my honour as a man, to give you every means of executing what you have undertaken, and to take such measures as will secure you the same opportunity should I die. She said right," he continued, holding out his hand to me, "she said right, poor girl; you do possess my confidence most fully; none ever possessed it so much; and would to God, would to God, that you had possessed it more! Oh, had I but trusted your words! oh God! oh God! that it should now be all beyond recall!" and he groaned bitterly under the torture of remorse.

"Tell me," he cried, after a long pause, "tell me! do you know of any cause which that woman—that Suzette had to hate her mistress?"

"Personally I know of none," I answered; "but, if I mistake not, good old Jerome Laborde could assign sufficient reasons for all her malice."

"I will enquire!" he rejoined, "I will enquire!" and carefully locking the doors, he turned away from the apartments of his dead wife.

The agitation and exertion he had gone through, however, had been too much for him; and ere he reached the library, towards which his steps were directed in the first instance, he was obliged to turn to his own chamber, and lie down to rest for the remainder of the day. The next morning, early, good old Jerome Laborde was summoned to his master's presence, and I fully believe, in his fright,—for he held Monsieur de Villardin in great awe—he would either have prevaricated so desperately as not to obtain credence for his tale, or he would have denied any knowledge of Suzette's behaviour altogether. I luckily, however, saw him before he went, and exhorted him to tell the whole truth exactly as it was; and I conclude he did so, though I was not present.

Whatever took place, the result was but just; for no sooner was his conference over with Monsieur de Villardin than the good major-domo came forth, armed with authority to send forth Madame Suzette, with all her movables, without allowing her to sleep another night in the house.

Some time was, indeed, consumed in her preparations; but as I had notice from Jerome of the order he had received, and I intended to spend the greater part of the day in my own apartments, I certainly did not expect to see Suzette more. I was astonished, however, by the door of my little saloon being thrown unceremoniously open about two hours after, and in walked the soubrette, with an air of determined effrontery which I have seldom seen surpassed in man or woman.

"I have come, Monsieur l'Anglais," she said, making me a mock courtesy, "to take my leave of you before I go, and to thank you for all your kindness. I am not unaware of all your good offices, and as I shall not, in all probability, be very far off, I shall take good care to repay them. I do not doubt that some opportunity will occur; in the meantime, farewell!" and without waiting any reply she walked out of the room, leaving all the doors open behind her as she went.

CHAPTER XX.

As it is not so much the history of other people that I am writing as my own, I must now speak for a few minutes of myself, and of all that had been going on during some years in the little world of my own bosom. During the last six months a greater change had taken place in my mind and my character than I ever remember to have felt at any other period of my life,—though I suppose that there is no epoch in man's existence when his feelings and disposition may be considered as to irrevocably fixed as to be insusceptible, during the rest of his days, of change or modification. The original fabric of the mind, of course, remains the same; but—as education shares with nature in the character of each human being, and as life is but a continual education,—I feel convinced that we go on altering from the cradle to the grave. The tree grows up and spreads, and certainly remains for ever the ash, the elm, or the oak that it first sprouted from the ground; but its form, and appearance, and size, and strength, and beauty are changed by winds, and storms, and circumstances, and accidents, and position, and time; and so, I am convinced, it is with the human heart. We are all change throughout our being; and were it not for a few remaining traits, a few slight traces, of early predilections and original character, it would be very difficult for the old man or the man of middle age to prove, even to himself, from the state of his own mind, his identity with the young man or the boy. The alterations which had taken place in my own mind and feelings, however, within the last six months, had been so great and rapid that they were even remarkable to myself, and now form, in memory, an epoch from which I date a new and distinct course of being. My corporeal frame, it is true, was also undergoing a change, and rising rapidly, almost prematurely, towards manhood; but my mind was also affected, in a manner totally distinct and apart, by the scenes in which I mingled, by the persons with whom I conversed, and by the deep feelings, strong passions, and awful events, in all of which I took a part. Scarcely a year before, scenes of bloodshed and slaughter, energetic attempts, and dangerous enterprises, had passed around me as a sort of pageant in which I acted my part without any deep or lasting impression—without any great thought or excited passion. It had been all a sort of youthful sport to me, which—although I suffered some inconveniences, felt some sorrows, and encountered many dangers—was upon the whole more a matter of amusement than of pain. My first deep grief was occasioned by the death of my father. My first strongly-roused passion was the thirst for vengeance upon the man that had slain him. After that came my connection with Lord Masterton, and certainly the love and affection that I felt towards him, and the interest I took in his fate and in that of the Lady Emily, prepared the way for what I was now feeling: but still it was all very, very different from my intense participation in the passions and the sorrows of Monsieur and Madame de Villardin, and equally so from the sensations of gloom and awe which the sad events that were passing around me impressed upon my mind. The effect of my conversations with Father Ferdinand I have already related; and under the influence of the whole together I found my heart losing rapidly its boyish lightness, and becoming, day by day, susceptible of more deep and powerful sympathies than I ever dreamed it was possible to feel. If I may use the expression, during the last six months I had been educated in the school of dark and vehement passions, and the lessons that I had received had been at least so far instructive as to teach me, whatever I felt, to feel deeply. The boldness and decision of my conduct in former times had proceeded both from the promptness of determination which my father had inculcated, and from the habit which I had acquired, amidst scenes of turbulence and confusion, of valuing human life and all connected with it as a mere nothing; but now, although I had learned to estimate almost everything differently, yet, by having been taught to feel a deep and personal interest in all with whom I became connected, I had acquired a new and stronger motive for exercising the same promptitude in all circumstances, and employing even more vigorously than before all the best energies of my mind.

Such had become my feelings at the time when Monsieur de Villardin recovered; and even in watching by his sick bed I had experienced the greatest difference between the sensations which I then felt towards him and those which I remembered having undergone in attending upon Lord Masterton under somewhat similar circumstances. For Lord Masterton, indeed, I had felt as much affection and more esteem; but towards Monsieur de Villardin pity and regret, and many other mingled sensations, rendered my feelings of interest far more deep and intense. There were memories and ties between us that could never be broken; there was the confidence of dark and secret acts that could never be forgotten—there was many a deed of kindness and of feeling, too, which no conduct towards others could cancel as regarded myself; and even my very suspicions in respect to the last terrible catastrophe were in themselves a source of mournful, painful, but profound interest.

Such, then, as I have said, were my feelings when Monsieur de Villardin recovered; and if I had sympathised with him even under his madness and his errors, how much more was my affection increased towards him by the conduct that he subsequently pursued! The deep grief, the bitter remorse, the stern self-condemnation which he evidently felt, increased my esteem without diminishing my interest; and his conduct to myself, which I have related in the last chapter, scarcely gratified me so much, I confess, as his contemptuous dismissal of her who had traduced his injured wife.

The absence of Madame Suzette was most

indubitably a relief to the whole house, with the exception, perhaps, of one person in it. Even Mademoiselle de Villardin, young as she was, seemed to take a part in the general satisfaction; for she had already, though why I know not, acquired a distaste to the soubrette, which had been strongly apparent even before her mother's death, as well as a partiality for the Duchess's second woman, Lise, who now became the young lady's principal attendant.

The departure of Suzette was followed close by that of another person, who, though not so generally disliked in the household, was but little more amiable, at least in my eyes, than the soubrette herself. This was Gaspard de Belleville; but it would seem that Monsieur de Villardin had various motives for not dismissing him at once from his family with the same unceremonious decision which he had evinced towards the woman; and, therefore, waited for an opportunity of placing him in a situation where the road to honour and distinction was open to him, if he chose to follow it.

The first occasion that presented itself also gave rise to a temporary separation between Monsieur de Villardin and myself, and may require some further explanation than could be afforded by a mere detail of the circumstances which took place at the château. When Monsieur de Villardin had quitted Paris in haste, he had left the regency triumphant. The parliament had become the devoted slave of the court. The generals had made their peace. The young king, the queen-mother, and the cardinal, had entered Paris, and regained greater power than ever; and the only shadow of an independent faction that remained consisted in the union of the lower classes, led and headed by the Cardinal de Retz and the Duke of Beaufort. Mazarin ruled everything; but he soon began to find that a friend, to whose services he owed everything, might be more difficult to manage than even an enemy. The Prince de Condé had restored him to authority, and brought back the court in triumph: but, young, vehement, and hasty, he considered his claims as inexhaustible, and the slightest opposition he looked upon as an insult. Supported by his brother-in-law, the Duke de Longueville, by his brother, the Prince de Conti, and a number of the first nobles of the land, he soon aimed at governing the state, opposed the court in all its proceedings, dictated to the regent, and insulted the minister. The crafty Italian, however, now feeling himself more secure, determined at once to coalesce with his former enemies, in order to punish one, who, from his protector, had changed into his tyrant. To the party of the Fronde, led by the Cardinal de Retz, the great Condé was, for the time, as much an object of hate and jealousy as he was to Mazarin himself; and, for the purpose of revenging upon him the former defeats of the Parisians, De Retz willingly joined with the minister, for whom he entertained the most thorough contempt. Taken by surprise in the very palace itself, the Princes of Condé and Conti, and the Duke de Longueville, were arrested by the captain of the queen's guards, and were hurried off as fast as possible to the castle of Vincennes. Terror immediately seized upon all their partisans, and one half the nobility of France fled from Paris on the day of their arrest. Mary de Bourbon, Duchess of Longueville, breathing indignation against the enemy of her brothers and her husband, made her escape into Normandy, accompanied by about sixty horsemen, and declared that she would once more raise the standard of civil war. The Duke de Bouillon fled towards the south with the same purpose; the Maréchal de Luxembourg took the way to Burgundy; and the celebrated Turenne himself, proceeding into Champagne, instantly avowed himself the partisan of the princes, and levied troops for their deliverance.

Though such was the general feeling of the principal nobles of the French court, very different, indeed, were the sentiments of the people of Paris upon the arrest of the princes. Led by De Retz and Beaufort, and remembering the insults and defeats which Condé had inflicted upon them, the citizens of the capital could hardly find means sufficient to express their joy at the indignity offered to the greatest man of the country. Shouts and songs signalised his downfall. Bonfires blazed at every corner. Even the obnoxious minister himself was enthusiastically applauded for his ingratitude to his deliverer and protector; and everyone declared that after this act the Cardinal himself was no longer a Mazarin.

Various rumours of these occurrences, which had taken place early in the year, had reached us in our retirement at Dumont; but I need not tell the reader that we had quite sufficient matter in the events of our private life to occupy all our thoughts. Even had it not been so, it is more than probable that Monsieur de Villardin would have avoided taking any part in the civil dissensions of the time, as he might have found some difficulty in choosing the party to which he would give his support. Bound by ties of intimate regard to the Prince de Condé, he felt, of course, anxious for his liberation; and although he had opposed the Prince himself in the cause of the parliament, he was naturally of a loyal disposition. It is true that, like all the rest of the world at that time, he was destined to change his party more than once, but beyond doubt his own feelings naturally led him towards the court. Under these circumstances, in all probability, he would, as I have said, have remained neuter, notwithstanding that continual desire for activity which Lord Langleigh had noticed at the time I was first introduced to him: but about the period of which I speak, an application was made to him, which,—coming as it did at a moment when any sort of employment offered the prospect of relief from those bitter and consuming thoughts that preyed upon him,—proved irresistible.

About three days after the dismissal of Madame Suzette, I was riding by the side of the Duke in one of the roads leading direct to the château, when we were suddenly encountered by a horseman coming at full speed, who paused and drew up his horse as soon as he perceived our party. Singling out Monsieur de Villardin, he at once rode up to him, and delivered a sealed packet, which was received with that sort of listless air which a combination of sickness and despondency had left behind upon the Duke, who demanded carelessly, "From whom?"

"From the Princess de Condé, and the Dukes of Bouillon and Rochefoucault," replied the courier.

Three names so friendly to his ears caused Monsieur de Villardin to show a greater degree of interest than he had done at first; and, turning his horse, he bade the messenger follow, and rode back to the château. After dismounting, he retired to read his letters alone; and, as our proposed ride was thus brought to an end, I proceeded to join Father Ferdinand, whom I had seen walking in the park as we passed.

I strolled up and down the different alleys with him for nearly an hour; and though, of course, the deep shadow of the past still overhung us both, our conversation was lighter than usual; and the arrival of the messenger from the Princess de Condé furnished us with a subject which soon led us to the political events of the day. With these Father Ferdinand was much better acquainted than myself; and, in his brief but perspicuous manner, he gave me a clear view of all that had been lately passing in the capital. The detail was over, and we were moralising upon the facts, when a servant approached in breathless haste, telling me that he and several of his fellows had been seeking me everywhere, as the Duke had demanded to see me some time before. I followed at once, and found Monsieur de Villardin in his library with the letters still before him.

"Here are important tidings, and important requests," he said, pointing to the papers as I entered; "and, among other things to which they give rise, there is an expedition for you to perform, if you will undertake it." He looked up as he spoke for my reply; and I answered that anything with which he might think fit to charge me, I should feel honoured in performing; and he thus went on:—

"No, no; you must follow your own judgment, when you have heard what it is, John Marston. There may be danger in the case, my boy; and certainly some fatigue and exertion must be expended on the task. Tell me first, what you know of the events which have lately occurred in the capital. Are you aware that the Prince de Condé and his brother, as well as Monsieur de Longueville, are both in prison at Vincennes?"

I replied that I was well aware of the facts he mentioned, and added several others which I had learned both from general rumour, and from the more correct account of Father Ferdinand.

"Well, then, you know fully sufficient to judge of the risk," replied Monsieur de Villardin. "You can easily conceive that this notorious piece of injustice, committed in the case of three such distinguished persons, has set all France in a flame; and almost every man of honourable feeling is now putting his foot in the stirrup to compel the cardinal to liberate the princes. Monsieur de Bouillon here informs me, that the cause in Guienne is in the most hopeful state; and adjures me, both by my regard for him and by my regard for the Prince de Condé, to join him immediately with what force I can collect.

"At the same time, the Princess de Condé, while making a similar request, does not conceal that, by the influence used in Paris, she trusts to see her husband at liberty in a few weeks. Now, as the only motive which could induce me to join the party of the princes would be their continued imprisonment, I much desire, without calling attention upon myself, to ascertain the real state of the negotiations in Paris."

He then explained to me that it was his wish I should instantly set out for the capital, and, conferring with Gourville—an attendant of the Duke de Rochefoucault, then in Paris, employed in endeavouring to effect the liberation of the princes,—that I should make myself fully acquainted with every particular of their situation. At the same time he proposed to send Gaspard de Belleville to the Duke de Bouillon and the Princess de Condé, charged with a message to the purport that he would join them at the end of three weeks, if he found that the princes were not likely to be liberated within a month.

Of course, I willingly undertook the task; and I could plainly see also that Monsieur de Villardin, although he was unwilling to commit himself again with the court, was secretly delighted with the prospect of once more entering upon an active course of life, which, by constant employment, would afford the means of withdrawing his thoughts from all the painful subjects on which they now rested. Eagerly and rapidly he drew up a letter to Gourville, bidding him confide entirely in me; and, having given it to me, he made me remark that he had written on the back, "By the hands of Monsieur de Juvigny."

"You must, on no account," he added, "appear as a foreigner, which in Paris would instantly call upon you a degree of attention that is to be avoided by all means. You have now no longer the slightest accent, except, indeed, it be a touch of the *patois* of Bretagne; which, however, will the more confirm the Parisians in the belief that you are a Frenchman, and you may boldly pass yourself as a Breton even upon Gourville himself. I must furnish you, however, with plenty of that golden oil which makes all doors turn easily upon their hinges; and, remember, spare no expense to reach Paris soon, and to return quickly; for every hour spent upon the road is lost to better purposes. Not so, however, with your enquiries: let them be diligent and minute; do not come away without knowing everything that can be known; and remember, that should fortune, which has been favourable to you in many instances, put it in your power to aid or serve the Prince de Condé, you have my strongest injunction to do so."

Whether he suspected that such would, indeed, prove the case, I do not know; but he three times spoke of the chance of my serving the Prince as not impossible, and reiterated his charge to take advantage of it, if it did occur. He then added a great many cautions and explanations for the direction of my conduct, and gave me a larger sum of money than ever I had possessed before. To all this he joined a number of billets of introduction to different persons of his acquaintance in Paris, conceived in the following terms:—

"*To Monsieur de ——.*

"Know, and put full confidence in my young friend, Monsieur de Juvigny.

(Signed) "DE VILLARDIN."

I found that this sort of *letter of credit* had been common in the times of the former war; and as it committed no party to anything, even if seized, was of course very convenient. Everything else apparently being arranged, I was taking my leave, intending to set out instantly, and alone, when Monsieur de Villardin, to my surprise, bade me take two of the servants, whom he named, to give me assistance in case of need.

"No, no, my lord," I said, "for Heaven's sake do not inflict such shackles upon me; I shall be much better by myself; and as to assistance, I shall want none, depend upon it. I have always been able to make my own eyes find my own way, and my own hand keep my own head, since I was eight years old; and with your permission I will go alone. Besides, if I took any of the servants from this place, I should have my English birth and education known to everyone they came near in five minutes—especially if we bade them keep it secret."

"Well, well, do as you please," replied the Duke; "but if you go alone, you had a great deal better ride post; for, as I know you are an indefatigable horseman, you will by that means be able to do double the distance in the same space of time"

To this I willingly agreed; and it having been arranged that I was at least to take a servant with me as far as the next relay, in order to bring back my own horse, I left Monsieur de Villardin, and proceeded to make my preparations, which, I need not say, were brief enough.

CHAPTER XXI.

I COULD not but feel melancholy as I rode away from the château, and passed by many of the spots which were engraven upon the tablet of my memory by acts and feelings that could never suffer them to be effaced. It was not, indeed, that I entertained any sad or gloomy anticipation in regard to the future; for, through life, the noblest blessing of all the many with which Heaven has heaped up my lot, has been that indestructible hopefulness of disposition, which always presents a bright prospect in the coming years; but it was that memory, as if stimulated by the act of leaving the place, called up again, and passed in long review before my eyes, all those dark hours and terrible deeds which had filled up my residence in Brittany. It was against my will that these recollections swarmed upon me; but there are moments when we have no power to bid memory cease her recapitulations—when the heart, often from some mere trifling accident, is cast prostrate before the past, and cannot struggle up against the torrent of remembrances that pour over it; and such was then the case with myself.

If I had given a world, I could not have banished from my thoughts the violent death, the dying countenance, the bloody grave of the Count de Mesnil; the gentle looks, the melancholy fate of Madame de Villardin—the gloomy swimming down that fatal stream in the endeavour to find her, the long torch-light search for her body, and the terrible nights of watching I had spent by the bedside of her delirious and culpable husband.

As memory would have way, I strove to turn it into some gentler course, and tried to fix it upon something sweeter in the past. There were only two or three acts, however, which I could recall, that afforded a pleasant resting-place for thought in all that had occurred to me since I first entered the house of Monsieur de Villardin. The efforts I had made to remove from the mind of the Duke the wild suspicions that he had then entertained of his wife, were now, of course, most grateful in remembrance. Nor, indeed, do I recollect, amongst all that I ever did in my life, anything which gave me greater pleasure than I experienced at that moment, in calling to mind the rescue of sweet little Laura de Villardin from the same stream that had afterwards proved fatal to her mother, though, after all, it was but the service of a water-dog. Neither, indeed, did the memory of all the little kindnesses I had shown to Jacques Marlot prove at all ungrateful to me, though I confess, they had been done more in a spirit of merriment, perhaps, than benevolence. One is almost always beneficent when one laughs, with the exception, perhaps, of a few human hyenas, who scarcely deserve the name of men; and, notwithstanding all his misfortunes and distresses, the worthy printer was always connected in my mind with associations of a gay and jocose character.

It was upon him, then, by this train of associations, that my thoughts last rested as I rode away from the château of Dumont; and as my constant attendance upon Monsieur de Villardin had prevented my seeing Maître Jacques for nearly six weeks, I was suddenly seized with a great desire to take leave of him ere I went to Paris. The road by his house was as near, though somewhat rougher, and I turned my bridle thitherward almost as soon as his image rose up before my mind. At his door I met with Father Ferdinand, whom I had left a couple of hours before in the park; and, after explaining to the good priest that I was bound to Paris, on the business of Monsieur de Villardin, I received his benediction and one or two injunctions in regard to my conduct; and, while he pursued his way back to the château, I knocked loudly with the butt of my whip at the door of the ci-devant printer. He came out immediately, and but few words passed between us, as I had not time to dismount. Nor, indeed, did he ask me to come in when he found that I was bound upon an errand of importance, but, wishing me all prosperity, and that I might live long enough to save a great number of honest men from the gallows, he bade me adieu, and suffered me to depart.

I have marked this visit, for, strange enough to say, it was the last time that I saw the good printer for nearly six years; and, by the end of that period, I need hardly say that we had both undergone many changes, at least in personal appearance.

From Juvigny I rode on as fast as possible to the next post relay, and there, leaving my horse with the servant who had accompanied me, I set out with my postilion for Paris as fast as I could go. Remembering the directions which I had received, I certainly did not fail to make all speed; and I found it no difficult thing to induce the post-boys to put much more celerity into their beasts than the law required, or, indeed, allowed. By this means, and by utter forgetfulness of all personal fatigue, I reached Paris full two days sooner than I should otherwise have done, and much earlier, I am convinced, than Monsieur de Villardin himself anticipated.

The moment I arrived, I found out the residence of Gourville, who was then lodging at a small house in the Rue St. Thomas; and, after some difficulty, which showed me that he was not very much at his ease in regard to his own situation, I was admitted to his apartments, and found a young man of a shrewd, intelligent countenance, and simple but not vulgar manners. Following a habit I had acquired of examining every new face closely ere I said a word myself, I paused a moment or two before I delivered the letter with which I was charged from Monsieur de Villardin, and I could easily see that Gourville was annoyed and alarmed by the visit of a person so completely a stranger to him, and whose manners, I believe, appeared somewhat extraordinary. The moment, however, that I had explained to him the object of my coming, his countenance cleared, but still he said not one word which could have committed himself in any way, till he had first read Monsieur de Villardin's letter. Nor was he even satisfied with that, without first speaking to me himself upon various matters which I very well understood were more designed to draw out my character, and ascertain whether I were really trustworthy, than to gain any information of another kind. As it was not at all unlike the conduct which I should have pursued myself under similar circumstances, I did not certainly feel in the least offended; and, after about half an hour spent in this sort of spider-like investigation, which did not take place less upon my side than upon his, we began more clearly to understand each other, and the conversation turned to the objects which brought me thither.

"Well, Monsieur de Juvigny," said Gourville, at length, "plainly and straightforwardly, what is it that you want to know?"

"Plainly and straightforwardly, then," I replied, "what I want to know is, whether there is any chance of the liberation of the princes, and whether that chance is immediate or remote?"

Gourville smiled, and paused for a moment or two, and then, assuming an air of frankness, which I never saw put on suddenly but when it was intended to deceive, he replied, "Oh! indubitably; there is every chance of their liberation. The princess dowager, as you well know, is every day presenting some new petition either to the court or to the parliament, and undoubtedly her just complaints will be in the end attended to; and the princes will be restored to that liberty of which they have been most unjustifiably deprived."

As I have said before, from the very air of candour with which he began to speak, I had perceived that Gourville intended to deceive me; and, therefore, I only smiled incredulously as a reply. "It is very true, I can assure you," he added; and I saw that, either from doubting my judgment, on account of my youth, or from some suspicion of my character, he was so far determined to give me no real information, that I must employ other means to extort it from him than any I had hitherto used. As I knew, however, that he could be depended upon for secrecy at least, I affected, at length, to receive what he said as truth; and replied, "Well, well, since such is the case—and of course I cannot doubt your word—I will immediately write to Monsieur de Villardin, informing him that there is no necessity whatever for his committing himself by joining the Princess and Monsieur de Bouillon at Bordeaux, as the princes are certain of obtaining their liberation, without his taking a step which might embroil him with many of his best friends, as well as with the court." This, of course, did not suit Gourville's plans at all, and, as I had foreseen, it forced him into an explanation.

"No, no, sir! no, no!" he replied. "Do not do that too hastily. Wait at least a day or two, that we may see the effect of the means we are using at present."

"That, I am sorry to say," replied I, "is quite out of the question. I came here, as you well know, to investigate for Monsieur de Villardin what were the chances in favour of the immediate liberation of the princes; and I promised him to write immediately after I had seen you, to give him such information as would determine the part that he was to take. Come, come, Monsieur Gourville, you are not acting candidly with me. If you speak frankly, you have nothing to fear. If you do not speak frankly, you may prevent Monsieur de Villardin from throwing his whole weight into the scale of the Princes. You may speak freely to me, I assure you. I am not so much of a boy as I may seem."

"It appears not, indeed," replied my companion; "and, therefore, I suppose I must speak frankly with you: but there is one thing, young gentleman, I would have you remark, which is, that if I do admit you to my confidence, you must take your part also in the schemes which I am pursuing; and as I tell you that they are just as likely to conduct everyone concerned in them to the gallows, as to produce any other result, you may judge whether this is the sort of confidence that you would like."

I smiled at his reply; and said, that I was too much accustomed to danger of all kinds to fear the gallows more than any other sort of death.

"Well, well, if that be the case," he replied, "the matter will soon be settled. Monsieur de Villardin here tells me to trust you entirely, and Monsieur de Rochefoucault enjoins me to trust in him in the same manner. So that, of course, I must obey, whatever be the consequences, though I do not, I confess, like to confide secrets of such vital importance to more people than necessary."

He then proceeded to inform me,—though with a great deal of difficulty and hesitation, even after having made up his mind to do so,—that a plan was, at that moment, in progress, for the liberation of the Prince de Condé, by means of the soldiers of the guard in garrison at Vincennes, where the Prince was at that time confined. These men, many of whom had served under Condé, and all of whom admired and loved him, Gourville represented as uniformly favourable to the scheme; and I learned that the execution of the whole was merely put off till the Sunday following, in order that the attempt might be made while the governor and officers were at vespers in the chapel.

"The only difficulty," he continued, "which presents itself in the course of the whole undertaking, is to prepare the Princes themselves for the effort that is to be made in their favour. No one is allowed to see them except Pallu, the surgeon of the Prince de Condé, who visits him three times a week, in order to dress the wound in his arm. Now Pallu is himself as much attached to the Prince as any man can be, but he is as timid as a child; and, notwithstanding all my persuasions, will not be the bearer of a message to his Highness."

"But cannot you contrive to introduce some one else?" I demanded; "I should think that might be easily done."

"Indeed!" said Gourville, with a smile. "I have turned it in my head in every way I can think of; and yet I not only do not see any easy method, but I confess that I perceive no possible means of conveying the information to Monsieur le Prince. We are, therefore, preparing to execute our scheme as well as we can without."

I mused a moment ere I answered, and then merely asked, what was the post which Gourville intended to assign me in the matter, and which he had declared was dangerous?

"Simply this," he replied, "and you will see at once, that it is not more perilous than that of any other person concerned. We are about to station twenty or thirty cavaliers in the different villages round Vincennes, divided into parties of three or four, and each provided with led horses, to afford the Princes the means of escape, whatever direction they may judge fit to take. If any of the parties are caught, they will be hanged, to a certainty, but each man must of course make his mind up to his risk; and what I proposed was, that you should be joined to one of these bodies, and act as guide to the Princes into Brittany, in case that they should determine upon pursuing that road; for I judge, by your tongue, that you are a Breton, and doubt not that you know the country well."

"That I do, most assuredly," replied I; "but nevertheless I think I can serve you better in another way—and not without exposing myself," I added, seeing a slight smile curl my companion's lip, "fully as much, if not more, than any of you."

"And pray what do you propose?" he said.

"Simply," I answered, "to convey the tidings of our design to the Princes themselves."

"Impossible," he replied; "depend upon it, that is quite impossible."

"Not near so much so, rest assured, as you imagine," I answered. "The fact is, I know Monsieur de Pallu well, for he attended long upon a gentleman to whom I was much attached, and I saw him regularly every day. Now I know all his manners and his habits so well that I could fearlessly take upon myself to feign myself one of his assistants, and to give such an account of himself and his person, if by any chance I should be questioned, that I am certain I should escape detection. I doubt not in the least," I added, seeing Gourville's countenance begin to brighten as my plan developed itself, "I doubt not in the least that, although he cannot be prevailed upon to deliver the message to the Princes himself, he may easily be induced to neglect his visit to Vincennes for one single day. As soon as that is determined, I will take advantage of the fact, and, dressing myself as a garçon apothicaire, I will present myself at Vincennes, with dressings and plasters, and, declaring that Monsieur de Pallu is ill, or called by some urgent case elsewhere, will demand to see the Prince and dress his arm."

"Bravo! mon cher Breton!" cried Gourville, catching me in his arms and actually embracing me; "bravo! bravo! Pallu will consent of course; and if he do not, a little gentle force or some good-natured *ruse* will easily bring the matters to bear, as far at least as he is concerned. Diable! I would keep him in his house with a pistol at his throat sooner than such a hopeful enterprise should fail.—But are you sure, my good young friend, that your courage will hold out?" he added, as he began to reflect; the very delight he felt at my proposal making him apprehensive lest it should fail. "Remember, for Heaven's sake, that Vincennes is a terrible looking place; and what with its drawbridges, its guards, and its chains, its gloomy passages and frowning stone walls, you may lose your presence of mind at the very moment when it is most necessary; and not only forfeit your own life, but overthrow our whole scheme."

"No fear! no fear!" I answered, smiling; "I am more accustomed to such work than you know of, and have no apprehensions."

"Well, well," answered Gourville, "have your will then; though I must say you look to me very young to have much acquaintance with proceedings dangerous in themselves, and ten thousand times more dangerous in their consequences. You cannot be above sixteen?"

"Not so much," I replied; "and yet for many a year I have lived amongst scenes to which all that is passing in these foolish wars is but child's play. But now let us concert our plans, that nothing may go wrong."

After some more conversation on the subject, Gourville proceeded to the house of Pallu, and finding him at home, went in, while I remained in the street. On his return he informed me that all was arranged with the worthy surgeon, who consented to show an apparent neglect to the Prince de Condé; but required that, in order to screen himself completely from the ire of the court, in case of our detection, a fictitious letter, demanding his immediate presence at St. Germain, should be sent to him at the very hour in the evening that he usually visited his patient in Vincennes.

All this was settled with the surgeon, and nothing remained but for me to play my part. The time for executing my design was, of necessity, three o'clock on the following day, as that was the usual period of Pallu's visit; and having proceeded to the house of the well-known fripier Martin, where every sort of dress under the sun was to be procured for a little more than its real value, I furnished myself with the complete equipment of a surgeon's élève. I spent the rest of that evening in concluding my arrangements with Gourville, who gave me all that minute information which was necessary to the accomplishment of what I had undertaken.

On the following morning, early, I rode out to St. Maur to see Lord Masterton, but found that both Lord Langleigh and himself were absent in Normandy. I saw the Lady Emily, however, and could not but feel what a contrast her bright and smiling looks afforded to those which had latterly appeared upon the countenance of poor Madame de Villardin, once as gay and happy as her own.

On my return to Paris, it was nearly time to set out for Vincennes; and, mounted on a little sturdy horse, which seemed made on purpose for a surgeon's pony, furnished with ointments and plasters in boundless profusion, and habited as a garçon chirurgien, I rode off upon my expedition, and soon approached the prison of the Princes. The castle had nothing very formidable in its aspect to my eyes; but, nevertheless, in gazing up at the donjon, and remembering the purpose of my visit, I felt more as I used to do in days of old than I had done for some time. I was little "Ball o' Fire" all over; and I could almost have fancied myself upon some of my expeditions during the civil wars of England. This feeling tended to put me much more at my ease than I might otherwise have been; and as there is nothing so serviceable as effrontery under such circumstances, it proved of real use to me.

On entering the gate, the first question asked me was by a grim-looking guardsman, who came up as the sentry stopped me, and demanded what I wanted there.

I answered, with all the naïveté in the world, that I wanted to see the Prince de Condé.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the guard, not a little astonished at my coolness. "And pray what may be your name, my good youth?"

"I am called Jerome," I replied; "and I am assistant to Monsieur de Pallu, the surgeon, who sent me here, because he was obliged——"

"Oh, if that be the case," cried the soldier, interrupting me, "you must come to Monsieur de Bar. We cannot let you in without his authority, for we must not even speak to the Prince ourselves."

From the man's tone, I doubted not that this was one of the serjeants of the guard, whom Gourville had spoken of as in the interest of the Princes; but of course I had nothing to do but to go through with my part as garçon apothicaire; and, therefore, assuming as stupid an air as possible, I suffered myself to be led to the presence of Monsieur de Bar, the governor. I never saw a less prepossessing fellow, or one better framed by the hand of nature for a gaoler. As soon as I had informed him that Monsieur de Pallu, having been sent for to St. Germain on a case of life and death, had despatched me to dress the Prince's arm, which he thought could not remain till the following day, the governor knit his brows, and stared me all over with a heavy frown, as if I had committed some offence. But, without taking any notice, or showing the slightest agitation, I stood upon one leg, like an awkward boy, and looked round the room with an air of stolid curiosity, which completely deceived him.

"Monsieur de Pallu should not have gone away on any pretext," said the governor, abruptly, when he had satisfied himself with his examination of my person. It is disgraceful of him to send a stupid boy like you to dress the Prince's wound. I have a great mind to send you back."

I gazed at him for a moment with open mouth and eyes; and then, assuring him that I could dress the wound as well as Monsieur de Pallu himself, I proceeded to detail exactly that surgeon's method of proceeding, which I had watched attentively during his attendance on Lord Masterton. The governor cut me short, with an oath, however; and telling me that he did not want to learn surgery, rose, and took the key of the apartments in which the Princes were confined.

Throwing open the door, he pushed me in by the shoulders, bidding me to knock loudly at that same door when I had done, and not to stop longer than necessary. I now found myself alone, in a little ante-chamber; and, as it had but one other door, of course I advanced towards it, and entered the next room without ceremony. Here, seated at a table, which was covered with pots of beautiful carnations, sat a young man of about five or six and twenty, busily tending and arranging his flowers. He was alone—though I heard voices in a chamber beyond;—and, from the whole appearance of the apartment, the neglect and poverty of the furniture, and the simplicity of the young man's own attire, I might have imagined that he was some valet de chambre, admitted to the prison in order to attend upon the Princes, had he not looked up: as he did so, however, the eagle-eye could not be mistaken, and I felt that I must be in the presence of the great Condé.

"Who are you, my boy?" he asked, as soon as he saw me. "Good faith, this is a pleasing novelty: I have not seen a new face these two months; let me look at you:" and, rising from his seat, he approached the window near which I passed as I entered from the ante-room. He was neither very tall nor very strongly made, but there was the promise of extraordinary activity in every limb. His features were slightly aquiline, and in general good, without being very striking. But his eye was, indeed, remarkable. It was deep set, it is true, and not particularly large; but there was a light, and a keenness, and an intensity in its slightest glance that is quite indescribable. It was quick, too, as the lightning; and I observed that at almost every other word the corner of the eyebrow next the nose was drawn forward and rounded, as it were, so as to shade the eye in a degree, and to cut off every ray of light but those which fell upon the object at which he was looking.

"Who are you, my boy? Who are you?—who are you?" he repeated quickly. "Has Monsieur de Bar forgotten himself, and learned to believe that gentlemanly conduct is consistent with the office of a gaoler?"

For a moment I was in doubt how to answer; but, as I still heard voices in the other room, I thought it best to be cautious, and, being obliged to speak loud, on account of my distance from the Prince at the moment, I told him the same story that I had passed upon the governor.

"Ha!" he said, "Pallu should have come to me first. He forgets that he is my oracle as well as surgeon, and the only human thing that I see from week's end to week's end, except the grim visages of my gaolers, or the gloomy ones of my fellow prisoners. However, if there was life or death in the case, as you say, of course he could not come."

While he was speaking I advanced quietly to the table, and, putting down the packet of salves and dressings upon it, I approached closer to the Prince without saying a word. He looked at me sharply as I did so, seeming to comprehend at once that there was something extraordinary in this manœuvre; and when I was within about a yard of him, he put out his hand to stop my further advance, saying, "Stay, stay; no nearer, if you please, till I hear more of your business."

I bowed low, and replied, in a tone that could only be heard by himself, "If your Highness will sit down and permit me to dress your arm, or, at least, to seem to do so, I may prove more oracular than Monsieur de Pallu. I come from your Highness's faithful friend and servant, Monsieur de Villardin, and from your no less faithful servant, Gourville."

"Hush!" he replied, "hush!" and, advancing to the door which led into the other room, he said, speaking to the Prince de Conti and the Duke de Longueville, who were within, "Messieurs, I am going to have my wound dressed; and, therefore, unless you wish to learn surgery, you may stay where you are for half an hour." He then closed the door, and, returning to his seat near the table, stripped off his coat, and, drawing back his sleeve, presented his arm to me, saying at the same time, "Now!"

I, on my part, busied myself with the dressings, and, while I did so, proceeded to explain to him in a low tone, but as distinctly as possible, the measures that had been taken for setting him at liberty on the Sunday following. I told him that the guards, who had entered into our plan, were already provided with the means of fastening the officers into the chapel during the vesper service, that horses would be ready at each of the villages within four miles of Vincennes, that the whole garrison was in his favour, and that nothing was wanting but preparation on his part to take advantage of the opportunity when it occurred.

"Fear not," he replied, in the same tone, "fear not that I will be found unprepared. No, no; as soon as that door is open, I will be quite ready to walk out of it. But tell me," he added, "who are you that have been trusted with such an important communication, and have had courage and address sufficient to execute it?"

"I am one, your Highness," replied I, "for whom you were kind enough some time ago, at the intercession of Monsieur de Villardin, to obtain some favours at the hands of the court."

"What! the young Englishman," he cried, "who saved his daughter's life! Is it so?"

I replied in the affirmative, and he added, "Well, then, they were the last favours that I obtained for anyone, for not three days after my arrest took place."

"Most grateful I am to your Highness," I replied, "and I thank Heaven that the commission with which Monsieur de Villardin has intrusted me enables me to be of some slight service to your cause."

"Of inestimable service, young gentleman," he replied; "for, in truth, I know none, except yourself, and perhaps Gourville, who would have undertaken the dangerous task which you have accomplished. Should you be successful,—which I will not doubt, since the scheme is so well devised and so well conducted,—I shall not be found wanting in gratitude to any who have served me; especially to one who has served me so well as you have: and now, as it is clear enough that you know nothing of dressing wounds, get you gone as speedily as possible, lest Pallu himself should come, and worse should befall you."

"There is no fear, my lord," I replied; "we have taken good means to keep Monsieur de Pallu away."

"Indeed!" he answered, "then it would seem you have forgot nothing; but, nevertheless, I am anxious for your safety. Tell Gourville and the rest that I shall be ready to a moment at the hour of vespers; and, once beyond these prison walls, the court and Mazarin shall have something to remember which they may find not easy to forget. Fare you well, young man; and be sure that, whether we succeed or not, Condé will not be found ungrateful."

My errand was done, and of course I did not feel inclined to linger in such dangerous circumstances.

Gathering up all the trumpery which I had brought with me on the pretence of dressing his wound, I took my leave, and, retiring into the ante-chamber, I knocked hard, as I had been told to do, in order to call someone to the door. During nearly ten minutes, however, I knocked in vain, and, of course, gradually increased the vehemence of my application, till the whole passages rang again with the sound. At length the governor appeared, and showered upon my head no mitigated abuse for the noise which I had made. As it was necessary, however, to proceed with the same caution in effecting my exit as I had employed in procuring admittance to the prison, I resumed my air of stupidity, and, muttering something about having knocked for ten minutes, I glided past him as he locked the door, and walked on towards the stairs. With a few more abusive epithets he suffered me to depart, and, passing down into the court, the wicket gate was thrown open for me to go out into the park.

As the soldier at the gate maliciously refused to open it any farther, I was obliged to lead my pony through the wicket; and as the aperture seemed much less than the animal conceived its own dignity and magnitude required, it cost me nearly a quarter of an hour to force it through. When this was at length effected, amidst the merriment of the soldiers, I mounted, and proceeded on my way; nor did anything occur in the course of my ride towards Paris which was worthy of remark, except the fact of my meeting, at about twenty yards from the gate of the château, one of the serjeants of the guard, who, with downcast looks, and a rapid but unsteady pace, was returning towards the castle which I had just left.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was late in the day when I returned to Gourville's lodging, and I thought he would have gone mad with joy when I told him the success of my attempt. He frankly avowed to me also that, though well accustomed to dangerous enterprises, he had listened during my absence for every sound, expecting each minute to find that I had been arrested, and that a *lettre de cachet* had been sent for his own apprehension.

"And did you really think, Monsieur Gourville," I demanded, "that even had I been stopped myself, I would have implicated you?"

"There is no knowing, Monsieur,—there is no knowing," replied he: "the question is not a pleasant thing, and I have never been able to tell how I should myself behave under its infliction. I acknowledge that it is just as likely that I should yield all sorts of secrets to its potent influence, as that I should conceal them."

"Of course, then, I can neither be surprised nor offended," I replied, "at your attributing to me the same feelings; but to speak of other matters. To-morrow early I shall go out to St. Maur, to see if a friend, whom I expect there, has returned; but I shall be back in the evening, and you will find me at my auberge by five o'clock." Thus ended our conversation, and we parted.

It is wonderful what changes a few hours produce in this life. On leaving Gourville that night, we were both as fully persuaded as mortal men could be, that our scheme was going on better and better each hour. Nor did we entertain a doubt that we should be able to carry it forward successfully to the close. Ere I had risen from my bed, however, the next morning, I was surprised by someone knocking sharply at my chamber door; and on opening it, the first thing I saw was the face of Gourville, apparently many shades paler than it had been when I left him the night before. "We are lost!" he said; "some unfortunate accident has discovered our whole design."

"Unfortunate, indeed," I answered; "but let me hear, my good friend, what is it that has filled you with such sad tidings this morning, when I left you last night borne up upon the very pinions of hope?"

"I have just discovered," he replied, "that after a long consultation before daylight this morning between the Duke de Beaufort, the Archbishop coadjutor, the Cardinal, and the Duke of Orleans, Monsieur de Beaufort himself, with three troops of cavalry, set out for Vincennes a little before the dawn; and, after searching every village in the neighbourhood, proceeded to the château, and there remains."

This information was certainly alarming enough; but still it seemed to me necessary to obtain some more correct intelligence in regard to the causes of these movements on the part of the court than Gourville had yet obtained, ere we decided upon abandoning an attempt, which, as far as it had proceeded, had been conducted with great success. Gourville coincided with me in opinion; but the difficulty was, where and how to obtain the information that we required.

"At all events," he said, "it is my duty to communicate immediately what has occurred to the poor fellow, Franc-cœur, through whom I have carried on my correspondence with the soldiers at Vincennes. He belongs to another company of the guards who are now in Paris; and, as the matter may touch his life, should we be actually betrayed, I must give him instant notice, that he may betake himself to a place of security. As I go I will endeavour to obtain all the information I can, and will return in less than an hour, and let you know my discoveries."

He was as good as his word, and returning even paler than before, seemed somewhat surprised to find me quietly eating my breakfast, as if nothing had occurred to derange my ordinary habits, or affect my appetite. He now told me that he had found the serjeant not only informed of all the particulars with which he himself was acquainted, but also possessed of a knowledge of their cause. This he had communicated to Gourville, who now related it to me, and it appeared that one of the soldiers who had been trusted with the scheme for delivering the princes, had taken fright the day before, and, pretending to confess himself at the church of Nôtre Dame, had given the penetentiary a billet, informing him that, on the following Sunday, at three o'clock, the princes were to be set at liberty, by means of an understanding between their friends and some persons within the castle of Vincennes.

"Now," continued Gourville, "although Franc-cœur declares that, notwithstanding this piece of treachery, he is sure his comrade will not betray us any farther, yet, as it is clear that our scheme is now hopeless, and as I never put great faith in any man's resolution under the influence of the question, I think it will be a great deal better both for you and me to leave Paris as fast as possible."

"Certainly, as the scheme is hopeless," I replied, "I see nothing that should detain us; and therefore I shall return with all speed to Brittany, where, perhaps, it may be advisable," I added, with a laugh, "to tell Monsieur de Villardin by no means to put any trust in all those fine petitions and remonstrances of the Princess Dowager, of which you boasted so much when first I saw you."

"No, no," replied Gourville, smiling in turn: "let him not rely upon them for the liberation of his princely friend. Tell him rather, for me, that I now look upon it as absolutely impossible to obtain the freedom of the Princes by any means but the sword. The Parliament and the Queen are alike resolved not to give them their liberty; and it is to the efforts of their friends alone that we must look for their deliverance."

After a few more words to the same effect, we parted; and mounting the sturdy little horse which I had bought to carry me to Vincennes, I rode away as hard as I could, on the side of Brittany. When I had completely tired out my beast I again took the post, and pursued my way towards Dumont, with very little rest or cessation. It is true, when I arrived I was desperately fatigued, for nine days had taken me to Paris and back, a distance of more than seven hundred miles; and, during the period of my absence, I had spent two whole days and part of another in the capital. Nor had I any very consolatory remembrances to make me bear up with spirit under my corporeal weariness, having been foiled in my endeavours to serve the Prince, at the moment that success seemed within my grasp; but at all events, I felt that I had some reason to be satisfied with my journey, inasmuch as I had obtained every information that Monsieur de Villardin could require, and had found an opportunity of personally seeing and attempting to aid his friend, though our scheme had ultimately proved ineffectual. The chief mortification, indeed, which I experienced, arose from a fear that the Prince de Condé—who would, of course, remain ignorant of the events which had taken place without the walls of his prison—might imagine that I had deceived him; and I could only console myself by remembering that one day he must learn the truth.

On arriving at Dumont, everything I saw announced that Monsieur de Villardin had not waited for the information which he had sent me to seek, ere he formed his determination. The desire of a change of scene and thought, and the wish to deliver his friend, had overcome every other feeling, and he was, in fact, actually in arms when I arrived. At first he would scarcely believe that I had performed the journey, but when he learned all that I had done besides, he loaded me with thanks and praises.

He then told me his own plans, and informed me that he could but allow me one day for repose, as on the Thursday morning following he was about to march, with all the forces he had been able to collect, for Bordeaux.

"I sent off Gaspard de Belleville to Bordeaux," he added, "the morning after your departure for Paris, charging him with a letter for the Princess, and another for Monsieur de Bouillon. In each of these I said, that unless the Princes were liberated within three weeks, their friends might expect to see me in Guyenne.—As Gaspard is now of age, too," he added, in that sort of peculiar discursive tone which a man assumes when he wishes to communicate a matter of particular interest, as if it were one of no interest at all,—"as Gaspard is now of age, too, to enter the service, I have requested Monsieur de Bouillon to give him a commission in one of the regiments at Bordeaux; but I have not forgotten you, and as I wish you always to be near me, I propose to give you a troop in the regiment of cavalry I am now raising. Monsieur de Turenne had a company of infantry at your age, and I see no reason why I should not do the same for you, especially as I have a great lack of officers who have stood fire."

Although, to tell the truth, I would much rather have entered the service on the part of the king and the court, than on the part of their adversaries, yet the idea of activity and enterprise seldom came amiss; and I thanked Monsieur de Villardin sincerely for his kindness, but added, that I trusted he would find the means of keeping me near him.

"I will make you my aide-de-camp," he replied; "but we have a number of other arrangements to attend to. Go, therefore, and lie down for two or three hours, and then join me in the esplanade at the end of the park."

I did as he bade me, as far as the lying down went; but, though tired to death, I could not sleep. I was much refreshed, however, even by the sort of repose I obtained, and as soon as I thought the time was expired, I got up and walked out to the esplanade, where I found that Monsieur de Villardin was occupied in reviewing, or rather drilling, the regiment he had been employed in raising during my absence. Four hundred men made the extent of his force, and amongst them only two, who had served in the wars of Paris, could give any assistance in matters of discipline, if we except half a dozen wild young nobles of the neighbourhood, who had joined the corps of the Duke, but who were not present on this occasion. I may say, then. that I was of no slight assistance to Monsieur de Villardin on that and the following day; for though he was undoubtedly an excellent officer, yet, of course, he could not drill four hundred men without help from some one. The cavaliers whom we had to deal with were in general tall, powerful men, from the upper districts of Brittany; and though they looked stupid enough at first, yet when what they were to do was explained to them, they proved neither dull of comprehension, nor slow in execution.

That which pleased me more than anything else in the whole scene was to observe that, while in actual exertion and activity, the deep, heavy gloom which had overshadowed the countenance of the Duke ever since the death of his wife passed away, and for the time he was himself again. This change only lasted for the time, it is true, and the moment he turned from the esplanade the cloud was as dark and stern as ever. Indeed, this observation may apply to the whole of the rest of his life. In the field I have often seen him cheerful, and even gay; but the moment that the temporary stimulus was withdrawn, he would fall back into a deep and bitter melancholy, which I never saw enlivened even by a smile. Generally after supper he retired to a solitary chamber, and there remained alone for several hours. At first I fancied that he occupied himself in reading, for which he always had a strong taste; but being obliged, on more than one occasion, in the course of the civil strife that ensued, to break in upon his retirement, I almost always found him immersed in deep thought, with his cheek resting on his hand; and never saw a book near him during those hours of the night that he thus passed alone.

On our return from the esplanade, which did not take place till a late hour of the evening, we found Father Ferdinand walking in the flower-garden with Mademoiselle de Villardin, and smiling upon all her young and graceful sports with that bland expression of reflected enjoyment which sits so well upon the lip of age. As soon as the little Laura beheld me she sprang up as usual to my neck, and, making a sort of seat of my arm, scolded me with childish vehemence for my long absence.

"He will be absent from you still longer, my sweet child," said Monsieur de Villardin, kissing her cheek; "and therefore you must remember to keep far from the water, as there will be no one there to save you. Do you know, my good Father," he added, turning to the priest, "that child would soon make me a very coward? The only thing I fear, in going to do what I conceive my duty, is, that I may never see her again."

He waited for no reply, but turned into the house, and we followed. After supper Father Ferdinand and myself were left alone, and I now learned more of the arrangements which Monsieur de Villardin had found it necessary to make, than he had himself communicated. As Brittany was in general loyal, and the governor most decidedly attached to the court against which the Duke was now in arms, he had determined upon sending his whole household, with Mademoiselle de Villardin, and everything easily movable, both from the Près Vallée and from Dumont, to the estates of his late wife at Virmont, in the Orleanois, where his daughter, being in the immediate neighbourhood of her grand-uncle, Monsieur de Loris, would, he fancied, be much more safe than in Brittany.

"They have already arrested the wife and sister of the Duke de Bouillon," said the confessor; "and Monsieur de Villardin thinks that if they imprison women as a sort of surety for their relatives, they may equally well imprison children. He has prevailed upon me," added the good priest, "to go to Virmont also, and to superintend the education of his daughter, though God knows I have every inducement to stay in this province, and no worldly motive has ever been able to make me quit it hitherto. Here I was born," he continued, musing; "here are all the associations of my infancy and of my age; nor did I think to leave it, though the Duke has frequently asked me. But I have now yielded to another voice, more persuasive than his."

"Indeed!" I said, in some surprise; and he instantly added, more in answer to my look than to the exclamation,—"The voice of my own heart, my son."

The conversation then rambled on in a desultory manner; and the worthy Father, ere we parted, gave me an infinity of good advice, which, of course, I was the more willing to take, because he put it less in the dogmatical form of directions in regard to my own conduct than under semblance of the results of his own experience and general observations upon man and the world. He exacted from me a promise, also, that I would write to him continually, giving him not only an account of the general events in which I was about to mingle, but also detailing my own actions, thoughts, and feelings, as far as it was wise and prudent to do so by the insecure conveyance of the post.

"In your letters to me, my son," he added, "you cannot be too minute; for, believe me, everything that concerns you, your health, your welfare, the progress of your mind, and the success of your fortunes, are all a matter of interest to me in no slight degree."

He has acknowledged to me since that his chief motive in exacting from me this promise was not so much the desire of watching over my conduct himself, as the wish to add a sort of safeguard to all the good principles he had endeavoured to instil into my mind; well knowing that the sense of moral responsibility is seldom so vivid in youth as greatly to affect our actions, unless some co-operating restraint compels us continually to examine our own hearts minutely. He did not choose to suffer his motive to appear at the moment, however laudable he knew it to be, fully understanding that my disposition was not one to submit to any checks but those I chose to impose upon myself. I notice this fact, indeed, more as a slight trait of that petty policy which the good Father suffered to mingle with his other more estimable qualities, than from any effect that was produced upon myself; as my absence at Bordeaux was too short, and the circumstances in which we were placed were too difficult, to admit of any extended correspondence between us at that time.

On the Thursday morning we began our march, and advanced rapidly towards Bordeaux, crossing an immense extent of country, which was at that time in a state of disorganization and confusion which nobody who did not see it at that period can possibly conceive. Indeed, I will not attempt to describe it; for no one living under an orderly and well-conducted form of government would believe that such a complete state of anarchy and misrule could be produced, throughout a whole country, by the follies and dissensions of half a dozen unruly and ambitious men. Although a single regiment would at any time have stopped us on our march, it not only seemed that no regiment was to be found in the whole tract which we traversed; but such was the state of apathy and confusion that reigned in every part of the kingdom, that no town or village through which we passed appeared to have had the slightest intimation of our approach till we showed ourselves in its streets. Monsieur de Villardin himself, quite accustomed to the sort of warfare which we were pursuing, advanced direct upon Bordeaux with very little caution, taking care, indeed, to avoid those towns which he knew to be garrisoned for the court; but heedless altogether—at least, so it seemed to me—in regard to the movements of our enemies, who were certainly marching in considerable force towards the same point with ourselves. The whole business, indeed, was conducted in so different a manner from that which I had seen in our civil wars in England, that I could not but come to the conclusion that the French were decidedly a better-tempered people than my own countrymen; and, without being braver, that they bore every sort of misfortune, fatigue, and danger, with a degree of light carelessness that no Englishman could have affected, much less felt, under similar circumstances.

How it happened that we did not encounter the army of Monsieur de Meilleraie I cannot at all explain, as we certainly must have passed within five miles of his camp. So, however, it did happen; and, after a march of rather more than ten days, we entered the city of Bordeaux, amidst the acclamations of the people, and the rejoicings of our friends and partisans. We found the town, indeed, in a very unpromising condition for undergoing a siege. Provision and stores, it is true, were most abundant, the people were zealous in the cause of the Princes, a considerable force of veteran troops were within the place, and the generals were experienced and determined; but the fortifications of the city itself were, to all appearance, incompetent to resist for a single day the attack of a regular army. The inhabitants would not hear of the suburbs being destroyed, for the defence of the rest of the city; and it became necessary to protect them also against the enemy, who was now approaching rapidly.

Diligence and activity, however, remedied many defects. Several redoubts were thrown up on the other side of the Garonne; the old castle of Blancfort, which had seen the days of the Black Prince, was destined once more to receive a garrison; and numbers of the citizens worked day and night at the wall and trenches, in order to put them in a state for resistance before the approach of the royal army. By this time the Duke of Epernon was within a few miles of the city, and the first active operations were undertaken on the side of Blancfort, from which place Monsieur de Chambon, our maréchal de camp, was forced to make a precipitate retreat. An effort was made on the part of the Bordelais to suppor him, in which our regiment took a share; but the nature of the ground which the enemy now occupied was so strong, that all we could accomplish was to cover the retreat of the maréchal de camp, which was now effected without difficulty and in good order. On that side the duke was held at bay; but the king and court were by this time at Libourne, while Monsieur de Meilleraie was advancing towards the faubourg St. Surin, which seemed quite untenable; and it was evident that he intended, if possible, to take advantage of its total want of defences, in order to storm the city by the Porte Digeaux.

It so happened, however, that in advance of the gate was a dunghill, on which had been thrown a considerable quantity of rubbish, left by some improvements which had been carried on about two years before in that quarter of the town, the whole forming an elevation of a few feet, at a short distance from the Porte Digeaux. On visiting the spot, to see what might best be done for the defence of the gate, the Dukes of Bouillon and Rochefoucault, together with Monsieur de Villardin and several others, advanced to the top of this little mound, in order to gain a better view of the surrounding objects, when it suddenly struck someone, I do not know whom, that the very heap on which they were standing might be converted into a half-moon, for the defence of the gate. No sooner was this plan proposed that it was executed. What little additions the time permitted were immediately made; and, though it was utterly impossible either to erect a parapet or to dig a fosse, a dunghill and a pile of rubbish thus became the principal defence of the city of Bordeaux.

Scarcely were these preparations complete, when the attack upon the faubourg commenced; and, while the Maréchal de Meilleraie himself proceeded to force the barricades which had been erected in the streets, and were defended vigorously by the Duke de Rochefoucault, a detachment was sent round by the vineyards and corn-fields, in order to turn the faubourg, and attack the half-moon from the west. This part of the plan, however, had been foreseen by Monsieur de Bouillon and Monsieur de Villardin; and although the maréchal succeeded in forcing the barricades in the faubourg, the detachment which I have mentioned got entangled amongst the hedges and walls of the vineyards, which had been previously garnished with several corps of infantry, and was glad to effect its retreat with the loss of nearly seven hundred men.

The events of the day gave great encouragement to the people of Bordeaux; and, though we found it very difficult to prevail upon the men to defend the half-moon with any degree of regularity, yet, whenever it was attacked by the enemy, a sudden sorti, from the Porte Digeaux and one of the neighbouring posterns, succeeded in all instances in repelling the assailants, and sweeping their trenches as far as they had been conducted.

I do not propose to give any minute account of this well-known siege. The part I took in it was little more than that of a common soldier, though, by volunteering my services upon all occasions and in every sort of occupation, I was continually in the midst of the fire. By a species of stupidity, or perhaps from early initiation into such scenes of peril, I have never been able to remember, when actually engaged in battle, that there was any sort of danger to be apprehended; and though, when Monsieur de Villardin and the Duke de Bouillon,—who about this time took a good deal of notice of me—reprehended me for exposing myself madly, as they called it, I used to make very strong and sincere resolutions of prudence and circumspection ; yet, whenever the next day came, and I found myself in the sally or on the half-moon, I quite forgot to look out for the danger, and never remembered my resolutions till I was once more within the walls.

Little occurred to me of a personal nature, during the whole of my residence at Bordeaux, that is at all worth relating. In the defence I endeavoured to do my duty ; and under such circumstances it is very difficult to do more. I was fortunate enough, however, to please those who commanded, and received more praise for my conduct than I at all deserved. As I was scarcely ever absent from the point of attack, my more peaceful operations consisted principally in eating, drinking, and sleeping ; and, as I knew nobody in the whole town, besides the personal attendants of Monsieur de Villardin, —with the exception of Gaspard de Belleville, who had now obtained a commission in the regiment of the Duke de Bouillon,—very little occurred to divert my thoughts even for a moment upon the operation of the siege. Gaspard I saw but seldom ; but when I did so, we met upon, perhaps, better terms than we had done in the house of Monsieur de Villardin. He had acquired a great deal of strut and swagger, it is true, upon the strength of his new situation ; but, by this time, he knew me too well to provoke me deliberately, and, therefore, always maintained a degree of civility with which I was quite satisfied. I fancied, indeed, now he had left Monsieur de Villardin, and had embarked in an entirely new course of life, that the jealousy with which he had regarded me, on account of the Duke's preference for myself, had become extinct, and that his hatred was consequently at an end ; but in this I afterwards found that I was mistaken. I had but little opportunity of observing his general conduct, but, from that which I did see of it, I should say, that, though not wanting in courage, he was at this time anything but enterprising; and that the great favour which he obtained with his commander was principally acquired by those somewhat servile and insinuating manners, which he knew well how to put on towards his superiors though he was insufferably insolent and domineering to everyone below him.

One little adventure I certainly did meet with, which, though it produced no results at the time, I could not help connecting in my own mind with the presence of Gaspard de Belleville in Bordeaux. Having returned to my own lodging, in the evening of the sixth day of the siege, in order to get something to eat, as I had not tasted food since the night before, I was suddenly disturbed at my supper, by a cry of "Alerte! Alerte!—to the walls! to the walls!" and, hurrying out as fast as possible, I was proceeding towards the Porte Digeaux, when, at the corner of one of the narrow streets, I ran accidentally against a lady handsomely dressed, and, nearly knocking her down, struck out of her hand the black velvet mask, called a *loup*, which was then very generally used by women in the higher classes, under the pretext of defending their complexions from the sun or from the sharp air. Stooping hurriedly down, I picked up the mask, and returned it to the lady, raising my eyes to her face, for the first time, as I did so. My surprise was not a little, I confess, to see in such gay habiliments Madame Suzette, the suivante of the late unhappy Duchesse de Villardin. She had recognised me sooner, and was gazing on me with an expression of countenance which I shall not easily forget,—such a strange mixture of coquetry, and hatred, and self-satisfied vanity did it display. Taking back her mask, she continued to gaze at me till she saw me about to speak ; and then applying it to her face, she turned upon her heel with an air of insolent scorn, and, tripping down the street, left me to pursue my way to the walls. Nor, during the rest of the siege, did I see her again, although I think I should have recognised her in despite of her *loup*.

For thirteen days the siege was continued with great activity ; the half-moon remained in the hands of the Bordelais, provisions were plenty, and the determination of the populace was but little shaken. However, the Maréchal de Meilleraie, finding his attack upon the Porte Digeaux unavailing, entered upon a new plan of operations, and pushed his trenches on the other side of the town, in the gardens between the archbishop's palace and the convent called the Chartron. Our proper quarters in the town lay in that very neighbourhood ; Monsieur de Villardin having been assigned a house by the side of the cathedral of St. Andrew, and his men being billeted in the streets round about him. We could do nothing, however, to stay the progress of the besiegers ; the trenches were carried on rapidly, and, notwithstanding sallies innumerable, a battery of six pieces of cannon opened upon the curtain, and very soon effected a practicable breach.

Of course, all was now anxiety in the city ; and, though the generals did everything in their power to keep up the spirits of the Bordelais, assuring them that the breach was not practicable, that internal works should be thrown up during the night to remedy the evil, and that they themselves, with their own followers, and the volunteers from the town, would undertake to make good their defence against all the troops which could be brought to act upon that point,—the people evidently lost heart; tumultuous meetings were held in different parts of the city; and I acknowledge that the only choice left for us appeared to me, either to be given up by the inhabitants as a sort of peace-offering to the court, or, at least, to die in the breach, defending a town that was no longer defensible.

Such, I believe, was the general opinion also of the principal officers and gentlemen engaged in the cause of the Princes; and it became a very difficult question how to act. Nor were the Bordelais themselves more decided. A number of generous voices were raised against the very idea of delivering up the noblemen, who had trusted them, to their bitter enemies; but the great multitude, which never knows any mean between rashness and timidity, called loudly upon their rulers to make peace with the court at every sacrifice.

From this unpleasant situation both parties were suddenly and unexpectedly relieved. While the magistrates were in debate in one place, and the generals were in debate in another, and while the people, collected in every street and market-place, were murmuring at their fate, and shouting against those who had brought it upon them, the news suddenly reached us, that a deputation from the Parliament of Paris had arrived at the gates, offering to negotiate a treaty between the defenders of Bordeaux and the besieging force. Everyone caught gladly at the idea; a suspension of hostilities was immediately granted, and deputies, both from the city and the generals, returned with the Parisians to the town of Bourg, at which place the whole court was assembled. The queen, timid and vacillating, did not understand or believe how completely the city was in her power. Mazarin, unwilling to bring upon himself the overwhelming odium of destroying such a number of the noblest families in France as were then cooped up in the city, did not press for any hard conditions; and I rather suspect that the Maréchal de Meilleraie, having a great number of friends amongst the besieged, rested satisfied with feeling that he had the city in his power, if he were forced to proceed, without making known the full advantage of his situation to those who might have been inclined to use it ungenerously.

The result, however, was, that the truce was extended to six days, and that during that time negotiations were carried on, which terminated in a treaty of peace, infinitely more favourable than the defenders of Bordeaux could have hoped or expected. It was agreed that full and free pardon should be given to all the inhabitants of the town, into which the court should enter, unaccompanied by any other troops than an ordinary guard; that the Princess de Condé and her son might retire in safety to Montrond, and that a general pardon should be given to all the other persons concerned directly or indirectly in the resistance offered by the city to the royal forces, upon the sole condition that the leaders should solemnly pledge themselves never to bear arms against the king again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

As soon as the treaty had been duly signed, the Princess de Condé, with four of her principal supporters, of whom Monsieur de Villardin was one, set out for Bourg, where they were as kindly received and as hospitably treated by the court, as if they had never borne arms against the throne. The whole party was splendidly entertained at the lodging of the cardinal prime minister; and on Monsieur de Villardin's return to Bordeaux, I found that no slight impression had been made on his mind by the gracious and unexpected reception he had met.

The young king himself, he informed me, had condescended to press him to take an active part in his service; and I gathered that the Duke had replied in such a manner, as to leave no doubt that, as soon as the Princes were set at liberty, there would be none more zealous and indefatigable in the royal cause than himself. Determined upon conducting his troops back to Brittany in person, the Duke despatched me with three or four servants across the country to Virmont, for the purpose of giving notice to Father Ferdinand and Mademoiselle de Villardin, that he was safe and well, and would speedily join us in the Orleanois.

Very well comprehending how glad the Duke was to find a fair excuse for taking up his residence in a part of the country which was less painfully associated in his mind than that which he had lately inhabited, I ventured to press him to be the bearer of his own good news to Virmont, and to suffer me to conduct the regiment back to Brittany, which I argued he might very well do, as almost all the other commanders were at once dismissing their men, and suffering them to find their way home as they best might. His ideas of duty, however, were in this respect far more strict than those of the other generals; and, adhering to his determination, he began his march on the following day, while I set out for Virmont.

I had now to travel through a part of the country I had never seen; and a rich and splendid land it was. No armies had passed for several years along the exact track which I took; and as I compared the smiling abundance of everything around me with the scenes of devastation and ruin I had so often seen, new estimations of many things on this earth began to present themselves to my mind, and I got even as far as to admit that, whatever charms a military life might have, it would be a sad and terrible act to change such prospects of beauty and happiness to scenes of ruin and desolation. The gradual progress of all these slow alterations in my own mind and feelings, working themselves out one after another through life, has been a subject of curious investigation to myself; and as I write for my own amusement, I shall still continue to put them down as they occur to my remembrance.

The first feeling that in my bosom tended most certainly to soften all the rest, was a growing taste for the beauties of nature, of every kind and description; and as I approached Virmont, the warm and luxuriant banks of the Loire struck me with the same pleasurable sensations as I had experienced on seeing the deep shades and tranquil stillness of the Près Vallée. Crossing the Loire at Gien, I turned to the right, and a little beyond Blénau was directed by the peasantry to the château de Virmont, which was situated in a dry and sandy soil, and surrounded by some rich but rather wild scenery. The house itself was not a very large one, but it possessed various advantages which were not to be found at either Dumont or the Près Vallée, and, especially in my eyes, was preferable to either of them, from being totally unconnected with the dark and gloomy remembrances that hung like a boding cloud over both the others.

Here I found Mademoiselle de Villardin with both Father Ferdinand and her worthy relation, the good old Count de Lorris; and great was the joy of all parties on hearing, not the successful issue of our undertaking, but the safe and fortunate manner in which it had terminated, after promising much less pleasant results. I think the ten days that followed were amongst the happiest of my whole life. I was in the society of three people, each of whom—though very different from each other—I loved; I was in a beautiful scene where all was new; I was myself caressed and applauded by everyone; there was no violent passion, either good or evil, in my bosom; and there was no restraint upon my actions. Even after we were joined by Monsieur de Villardin, although the deep melancholy which had now resumed its place in his demeanour of course cast a degree of gloom over the whole household; and though I especially felt grieved and pained to witness the bitter sorrow that preyed upon the heart of a man to whom I was sincerely attached, still the days passed pleasantly enough; and, treated in every respect as if I had been the Duke's own son, I had every reason to be content with my condition.

The passing of such days do not bear detail; but in the meantime events were taking place in other parts of France that again called us into active life. In Paris, the popular faction called the Fronde, at the head of which, as I have before said, were the Archbishop coadjutor de Retz and the Duke of Beaufort, had begun to take umbrage at the kindness which Mazarin and the court had shown to the defenders of Bordeaux; and knowing very well that the minister had only employed their party for the purpose of delivering himself from the Prince de Condé and his friends, the popular leaders began to suspect that Mazarin, as soon as it suited him, would make what conditions he pleased with the imprisoned Princes, and set them at liberty without the intervention of the Fronde. The success of the war in Guyenne had raised the minister higher than they liked also; and the Cardinal, foolishly believing himself quite secure, soon began to treat the Frondeurs with very little ceremony.

The Viscount de Turenne, it is true, was still in arms in Champagne, but the good fortune of Mazarin was again triumphant in this instance, as if on purpose to make him think himself beyond the power of fate.

The Maréchal du Plessis Praslin, an experienced officer, but one certainly inferior to Turenne in every respect, was sent against the only formidable opponent of the court that now remained, and, after various manœuvres on both parts, completely defeated Turenne, who fled to Bar-le-Duc, accompanied only by five hundred horse. This success increased the pride of Mazarin, and taught him vainly to imagine that he could at length put down the faction which had so long either ruled or disorganised the state; and although the parties of the court and the Fronde had, for a time, unnaturally united for the ruin of Condé and his family, they now found that the moment was come when the struggle between themselves was to be renewed. Each determined upon the liberation of the princes; but Mazarin sought to obtain more from the prisoners than the Fronde were inclined to demand; and he consequently temporised too long, while De Retz and Beaufort stirred up the people and the Parliament; and the cry for the liberation of Condé became as general amongst the Parisians as the rejoicings for his imprisonment had been about a year before. The Duke of Orleans, also, Lieutenant-General of the kingdom, always weak and always false, abandoned once more the cause of the minister. The cry for the liberation of the Princes was succeeded by a clamour for the exile of Mazarin. After many ineffectual struggles, the Queen Regent was obliged to yield her favourite to popular turbulence and the minister fled from the court, happy to escape with life. The very next morning, the Parliament of Paris, which not long before had condemned a man to death for publishing a libel against the Cardinal, now found reasons for declaring him a *disturber of the public peace*, and for passing sentence of outlawry against him; and the people and the Parliament prepared to liberate with joy the princes who had so lately been the objects of their execrations.

Mazarin, however, outstripped them in that very design; and wishing to take the credit of the act to himself, no sooner had he quitted the capital, than, proceeding to Havre, whither Condé and his companions had been removed, he threw open their prison doors, and himself announced their liberation. The princes treated him with the contempt he merited, and the disgraced minister, finding himself without resource, fled from a country to which he was destined to return, after a very short lapse of time, more powerful than ever.

One of the first acts of the Prince de Condé was to write a letter of thanks to Monsieur de Villardin, for the part he had taken in the late events; and he condescended especially to notice my somewhat dangerous enterprise in finding my way into Vincennes, for the purpose of communicating to him the plan framed by Gourville for his deliverance. He added, that he might have supposed I had deceived him, as the scheme was never put in execution, but that he had learned from other sources the cause which prevented the attempt; and he concluded by assuring Monsieur de Villardin that, if he could point out any object which either he or I desired, the whole influence of the house of Condé should be exerted to obtain it for us. This probably might have led me into other scenes, and indeed might have changed the complexion of my whole after life, had not events arisen which soon placed the Prince in a state of fiercer opposition to the court than ever.

Anne of Austria resolved to recall her favourite Mazarin: Condé himself, aspiring to govern the state, was determined that the minister should remain in exile. Means were soon found to embroil him with the party of the Fronde; and the Prince at length made up his mind both to revenge himself upon those who had caused his imprisonment, and to strike boldly for the supreme power by force of arms. Having once taken his resolution, he pursued it with all that fearless decision which rendered him a great general, but more than once made him a bad subject. Retiring from Paris, he negotiated with all his former friends and adherents; and, carrying his measures still farther, treated with Spain itself, the open and declared enemy of his native country. From that crown he received every assurance of assistance that he could desire, which assurances were fulfilled to the letter; but with his former partizans in France he was not by any means so successful. His causes of complaint against the court were not at all such as to justify the violent and ruinous measures he was pursuing. His own ambitious motives were apparent to every eye, and an immense change of circumstances had been effected by the simple fact of the young King having attained his majority. What people might affect to consider a struggle amongst the different powers of the state for the administration of the realm during the infancy of the King, could now be looked upon in no other light than as actual rebellion against the royal authority. The Duke of Bouillon—tied by the engagement made at Bourg, and seeing the present situation of the Prince in a very different light from that in which his position, while under imprisonment, had appeared to him—positively refused to take part in his rebellion, though the regiment he had raised, officers and soldiers, went over to the party of Condé. Turenne followed the example of his brother the Duc de Bouillon, and declined to act with the Prince against the court. Monsieur de Villardin also, in reply to a letter from Condé upon the subject, while he assured him of his unabated personal regard, informed him plainly that he not only would refuse all participation in new schemes against the court, but would consider himself bound to serve against anyone found in rebellion to the royal authority, now that the monarch had attained his majority.

Condé still, however, pursued his plan, and but too many were found to give him support in its execution. Nor did he calculate alone, it would seem, upon his present partizans, and upon the assistance of Spain; but, knowing the levity of all political characters in that day, he reckoned boldly upon a great number of his present enemies' coming over to his side, and foresaw, it would appear, that the approaching recall of Mazarin would soon induce the Fronde itself to co-operate directly or indirectly in his schemes. Retiring upon Guyenne, which, from various causes, was almost always ready for revolt, he at length absolutely raised the standard of rebellion against the King. A large body of troops, called the Corps de Condé, abandoned the royal army on the frontiers of Flanders, and went over at once to the Spanish force, which was now leagued with the Prince. Considerable bodies of troops joined him in Bordeaux, a great part of Berri took arms in his favour, and, once more, the flame of civil war was lighted throughout the land.

Negotiations were immediately entered into between the court and all those officers who had refused, on the present occasion, to serve with the Prince. Of these Monsieur de Villardin was of course one; and full powers were given to him to raise a regiment in the name of the King, with a great many other marks of the royal favour and confidence. He accepted the task without hesitation, and declared his positive determination never to suffer any circumstances to induce him again to oppose the royal authority; but, at the same time, in the vain hope that other events would cause Condé to make his submission, he delayed as long as possible taking any active part in the warlike operations against his friend, under the pretence of requiring some time to complete his preparations.

In the meantime Condé had lost no time, but was making such progress in Guyenne that the whole country began to take alarm at his success. The Count de Harcourt, however, soon after checked his advance on the side of Cogniac; and the Maréchal de Gramont, marching with a considerable body of troops towards Langon, threatened to turn the flank of the Prince's army. Each of the royal generals commanded more men, and better-disciplined forces, than those which followed Condé, and the Prince found himself obliged to choose between fighting under disadvantages which must have proved fatal, or temporizing with the court, in order to give time for a diversion to be effected in his favour. He accordingly, with consummate policy, made overtures to the Queen for permitting the return of Mazarin. The Queen, whose partiality for her minister did not permit her to see what Condé, as I have before said, had at once perceived, that the recall of the Cardinal would immediately throw the whole party of the Fronde, together with the Parliament and a great body of the people, entirely into the hands of the rebellious Prince, caught eagerly at the idea of the minister's return. Not only did she give Condé both time and repose by negotiating at a moment when her generals might have pushed their advantage to his complete overthrow, but, blindly running before the negotiation, she despatched courier after courier to Mazarin, without at all requiring that the Prince should commit himself with the Fronde by joining in the recall of the obnoxious Italian.

Mazarin lost no time, but at the head of a body of troops which he had raised in Germany, he entered France, and being immediately joined by the royal army in Champagne, he advanced at once across the country towards Poitiers. All that Condé had foreseen now took place: the Fronde, the Parliament, the people were astonished and indignant at the unexpected return of the hated minister. The Duke of Orleans obtained a decree from the Parliament of Paris, commanding all governors of towns to arrest him in his progress; a reward of fifty thousand crowns was offered for his head; an army was raised by the Duc de Beaufort, who effected his junction with the Duke de Nemours, the strongest partizan of the Prince de Condé, and their united forces were joined by a large body of Spaniards, which had been promised some time before. At the same time the Duke de Rohan, governor of Anjou, declared for Condé, with the whole province that he commanded, and every part of the empire seemed rising at once against the authority of the court.

Monsieur de Villardin now found that it was no longer a time for hesitation, and that if all the royalists remained inactive the constitution of the country itself must be overthrown. The greater part of the regiment which had served with him at Bordeaux had been again collected by his orders in Brittany; three or four more troops were easily raised in the Orleanois; the whole had been more perfectly disciplined during the time he had remained in inactivity than they had ever been before, and the moment that he heard of the general revolt he despatched couriers to the court at Poitiers, to announce that he was on his march to support its cause with an effective force of twelve hundred men. This reinforcement was a matter of no small consequence to a royal army in those days; and the pleasure that this news occasioned to the young King and his court was greatly increased from the circumstances of the time at which Monsieur de Villardin's declaration arrived, and from the hope it held out of others following his example.

A new era was now opening for me. One of the troops of Monsieur de Villardin's regiment, raised by the authority of the King himself, had been given to me, and the high road to honour and promotion was now thrown wide before me. The political events which I have narrated above had occupied a considerable space of time, so that I was now more than seventeen. The little property which the kindness of Lord Masterton and of Monsieur de Villardin had bestowed upon me was more than sufficient for all my wants and wishes; my troop was as fine and well-disciplined a one as any in the service; and on the twenty-eighth of February I commenced my march with Monsieur de Villardin, full of all the hopes of youth, although I had been prematurely taught the experience of manhood. I do not know that such a combination of the two is either pleasant or beneficial to him who possesses them; and I do believe that nature's plan is the best, in joining youthful inexperience to youthful passions. For my own part I may safely say, that having by the circumstances of my early days been carried too far forward all through life, I have always found that it was painful to be older than one's years.

We conducted our march as rapidly as possible towards Poitiers, and I remember nothing worth relating that occurred on the way. We found, however, at that town, that the court and army had proceeded to Saumur, and following it thither, with only a day's halt, we again approached the Loire. We were welcomed with infinite joy, and I was presented by Monsieur de Villardin to the minister and to the young King, by both of whom I was treated with great kindness. The former was an elderly man of mild and insinuating manners, but with nothing either impressive or graceful in his demeanour : the latter was a youth of a fine intelligent countenance, but apparently far more occupied with the thoughts of field sports and courtly gallantries than affairs of state or war.

The royal army at this time was commanded by Marshals Turenne and d'Hocquincourt ; and Monsieur de Villardin immediately received such an appointment under the command of the former as suited his rank and experience. We found, however, that our long march to Saumur might have been spared us, for within four days after our arrival it was announced that, quiet being restored in Anjou, and the Prince de Condé being kept in check by the Count de Harcourt and the Maréchal de Gramont, the king intended to return immediately to Paris, in order to take measures against the combined force of Spaniards and insurgents which was rapidly traversing Champagne, and advancing towards the Nivernois. The next morning the order to march was given ; and following the course of the Loire, for the purpose of securing the large towns situated upon that river, we passed through Tours, Amboise, and Blois, finding the country in general loyal, and willing to receive the royal army. Orleans, however, shut her gates against us ; and as our own force was small, while the enemy, to the number of fifteen thousand men, had already entered the Orleanois, the attempt to reduce the city by force would have been in vain.

Both the court and the generals were now eager to meet the Dukes of Nemours and Beaufort, who commanded the adverse force on the other side of the river, and between whom dissensions were said to exist which were likely to neutralise entirely the superiority of their forces : but none, certainly, was more desirous of dislodging them from their post than Monsieur de Villardin, inasmuch as they occupied a position extending from Montargis to the Loire, in a line drawn directly between Lorris and Virmont, at the latter of which places we had left Mademoiselle de Villardin, now a pretty little girl of about eleven years old. Ere anything else would be attempted, it was necessary to secure the bridge of Gergeaux, lest the enemy should pass the river and fall upon our rear. This, however, was not to be done without some trouble, as the bridge had already been seized by M. de l'Etouf, Lieutenant-General of the enemy's force, who had found time to effect a lodgment, and place his cannon, before sufficient troops could be brought up to dispute the possession.

Here, however, the genius of Turenne at once remedied all difficulties. Without ammunition, and with only two hundred men, he kept possession of the little town, erected a barricade upon the bridge, defended it for two hours against an immensely superior force, and yielded not a step till a sufficient reinforcement arrived to enable him to drive back the enemy and blow up the bridge.

Although not present at the beginning of the affair, I obtained leave to ride on before the party destined to support Monsieur de Turenne, and brought him the first news of its approach ; nor throughout all the scenes of the kind that I have witnessed, did I ever behold a man who, in the midst of danger and excitement, displayed such calm, unmoved tranquillity. He neither looked vehement, nor heated, nor anxious, but, in the midst of the enemy's fire, which was tremendous, listened to my report as if I had been giving him an invitation to dinner.

As soon as we had secured our rear by the destruction of the bridge of Gergeaux, we marched direct upon Gien, and passing the Loire by the bridge at that town, took up a position at the distance of about fifteen miles from the enemy, in order to ascertain their exact situation before hazarding any very bold stroke with our inferior force. The court established itself at Gien ; and Turenne fixed his head-quarters at Briare, while the Maréchal d'Hocquincourt took up his at Blénau. But it was now discovered that forage, which had been scarce along the whole line of our march, was not to be had in any sufficient quantity, and the cavalry was obliged to disperse in troops amongst the villages, in a semicircle of about twenty miles to the right, left, and rear, of our general position.

Monsieur de Villardin was obliged to remain with Turenne, but he directed me to post my troop as near as possible to the park and château of Virmont ; though, as a part of the enemy's advanced guard occupied the little village of that name, I could not approach so near as I could wish. We found, however, upon enquiry, that our adversaries were behaving with much courtesy to the people of the country, and that the château of Monsieur de Villardin had as yet been respected ; but, nevertheless, he was extremely anxious to withdraw his daughter and household, if possible, from so exposed a situation ; and on taking my leave of him I promised to negotiate with the officer who occupied the village in order to carry his wish into effect.

Thus long have I been obliged to pause upon the general history of the times, which has been much better detailed by others ; and as I am now about to return to my private life and personal adventures, I shall close this chapter here, and begin my narration of the events which followed on a fresh page.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LEAVING Monsieur de Villardin to set out with Turenne, for the purpose of reconnoitring the enemy's position, I put myself at the head of my troop, and advanced towards Virmont. It was the fifth of April, and as beautiful a spring morning as ever was seen; and, winding away from the banks of the Loire, I led the troop through the shady and obscure roads in the neighbourhood of Briare, every inch of which I well knew. The Duke had left the choice of my quarters to myself, as we were not yet sufficiently acquainted with the enemy's dispositions to enable him to decide for me; but, before quitting head-quarters, I had fixed in my own mind upon the ground that I would select, if I found it practicable on nearer inspection. I soon learned that it was so, for as we proceeded I met several peasants on the road, from whose report I was convinced that the post I proposed to take up was sufficiently removed from the enemy's line to permit of my occupying it with little risk. Without further hesitation, then, I advanced to the top of the hill above Virmont, and entered the village which I had already fixed upon for my quarters. The hamlet itself was situated in the midst of a grove of tall trees, upon the slope of the hill looking towards Briare; but, on the other side of the highway, commanding a view down into the valley on the side of Virmont and Montargis, was placed a little auberge, at which we had frequently paused upon our hunting expeditions, and to the landlord of which I was consequently well known. The enemy's extreme outpost was, as I have said, at Virmont, with the exception of a few cravattes thrown forward to a farm-house by the side of the river. Thus the village that I occupied, being on the other side of the hill, was out of sight of any of their quarters, while the whole ground covered by their avant-garde could be seen from the back window and garden of the little auberge at which I took up my abode. The grove of trees already mentioned hid the village itself from Briare: but I had remarked as we came, that a windmill, detached from the rest of the houses, was clearly to be seen at the head-quarters of Monsieur de Turenne.

The landlord of the inn was evidently delighted to see me, as he expected every hour to be put under contribution by the enemy; and he soon gave me a complete insight into all their movements since their arrival at Montargis. He set my mind at ease, too, in regard to the household at the château, assuring me that the officer who commanded at the village of Virmont had not suffered his men to commit any excess, nor even to penetrate within the walls of the park. All this was very satisfactory; but, of course, I determined to follow exactly the orders of Monsieur de Villardin; and, sending down a flag of truce, I demanded an interview with the commandant in the village. This he immediately granted, and riding down with two or three men, I met him in one of the meadows, by the side of a stream, across which our conversation was carried on. Explaining to him that it was the object of Monsieur de Villardin to remove his daughter and household to a place of greater security, I asked him, for courtesy's sake, to permit me to carry that purpose into effect.

To this he at once replied, that having the pleasure of being slightly acquainted with Monsieur de Villardin, he should be delighted to give him any proof of his high consideration and respect. He added, that I should be at liberty to pass the river with a serjeant's guard, if I thought it necessary, in order to escort the young lady to Briare or Gien.

As it was now near five o'clock, however, it was too late to take advantage of his offer that evening, and the officer charged himself to communicate to Father Ferdinand that I would be at the château the next morning, in order to guard himself and his charge to a place of security. Some farther conversation ensued in regard to the hour; and, in the midst of it, a horseman, followed by several attendants, came up at full speed, to communicate something to the officer with whom I had been speaking. The new comer sprang to the ground at once, and amidst feathers, and plumes, and lace, and embroidery, I recognised immediately my old enemy, Gaspard de Belleville. I saw that his remembrance of me was not less quick, but as he turned his back towards me, and seemed desirous of avoiding every appearance of recognition, I assumed an air of perfect unconsciousness, and bidding the officer adieu, with many thanks for his courtesy and politeness, I mounted my horse, and again rode up the hill. The distance was about two miles, and almost all the farmers who occupied the ground from the river to the village were either tenants or vassals of Monsieur de Villardin and Monsieur Lorris, and consequently completely at my command.

At each of the farmhouses, as I went, I paused for a few minutes, and explaining to the farmers the necessity of keeping an acute watch upon the enemy, I made them promise that in case they saw, during the night, any movement in advance, they would each, one after another, set fire to a pile of brushwood in their courtyard; and for the purpose of rendering our intelligence more secure, two or three of those in the immediate vicinity of the river agreed to take it by turns each night to sit up and mark the motions of the adverse force. On my arrival at the village, also, I rode directly to the mill, which luckily proved to be built of stone, with a little sort of platform near the top, by means of which the miller reached and regulated the sails. Much to his surprise, and somewhat to his consternation, I caused this little parapet to be loaded with brushwood, and then, explaining to him that it might be necessary to set fire to the pile, I told him to do his best to prevent the building itself from catching fire, in the event of our being compelled to use his mill as a stand for our beacon. Leaving half a dozen men to give him assistance in removing the sails and everything combustible from the neighbourhood of the platform, I returned to the little inn, and wrote a letter to Monsieur de Villardin, telling him what I had done, and informing him that if he saw my beacon lighted on the mill, he might be sure that the enemy were making some decided movement, preparatory to an attack upon the royal army. This I instantly sealed and sent off—though not without letting the Duke know that I had seen Gaspard de Belleville at the enemy's outpost, but leaving him to draw his own deductions.

Although these precautions might be very well justified by the general circumstances of the case, I confess that I should not have been so prudent as to take them, had no particular suspicion been superadded; but the simple fact of the appearance of Gaspard at the adverse *avant-garde* had set my mind upon forming a train of conclusions, which I shall now state, and which, though wild enough in themselves, ultimately proved correct. I have before said, that on being sent to Bordeaux by Monsieur de Villardin, the page, at his lord's solicitation, had received a commission in the regiment of the Duke de Bouillon. That regiment, officers and soldiers, had afterwards gone over to the Prince de Condé; and the last that we had heard of Gaspard de Belleville was, that he had gained considerable favour with the Prince, and had distinguished himself highly in his service during the revolt in Guienne. Everyone believed that Condé was still in that province, hemmed in by the Count de Harcourt and the Maréchal de Gramont. But Gaspard de Belleville, who was not the brightest genius that ever lived, had contrived to effect his passage through the forces of Harcourt and Gramont, and had joined the army of the Dukes of Beaufort and Nemours. Where he could pass, I thought, surely Condé could pass also; and I asked myself if there were not a thousand reasons for supposing he would make the attempt, if the enterprise were feasible. He could do little or nothing in Guienne; the Dukes of Nemours and Beaufort were wasting their time, and ruining a fine army, by their dissensions; no one could put an end to those disputes but Condé; and if he could but contrive to join their force, instead of being cooped up in a distant corner of the kingdom, without power to act, he would be at the head of a superior force, and interposed in an advantageous position between the capital and the royal army. Thus I thought there was every inducement for him to make the attempt; that it might be made with success was proved by the appearance of Gaspard de Belleville; and I doubted not that the great Condé himself was by this time at the head of the troops opposed to us. The next conclusion was, that if he really were so, we should not be long without having reason to be quite certain of his presence; and such were the motives that induced me to take the precautions I have related.

Nay, more; so strong was the impression upon my mind that many hours would not elapse before we should have cause for activity and exertion, that I would not take off my own clothes; but, after having suffered the horses to rest for five or six hours, I ordered them to be again saddled towards nine o'clock, and, placing a sentry at the end of the garden, I lay down for an hour or two on the table in the inn kitchen, the door of which was left open, that I might hear the first alarm. Everything remained quiet, however, till midnight, when the sentry paused by the door to inform me that he had seen some lights moving through the wood in the direction of Montargis. I instantly sprang up and went out into the garden; but the lights had disappeared; and though I gazed out for several minutes, I could see nothing to confirm the soldier's account. As I was about to turn away I heard a dull sort of sound coming up from the valley; and the moment afterwards a small spot of light appeared in the direction of the farm-house nearest to the stream. In a moment it grew larger, increased into a blaze, my other watchers took up the signal, fire after fire blazed up along the side of the hill, and, ordering the beacon on the mill to be instantly fired, I commanded the men to mount and draw out upon the high road, while I went down to reconnoitre what was passing in the valley. Scarcely had I taken a dozen steps in that direction, however, when one of the farmers on whom I could depend came up in breathless haste, to inform me that the avant-garde of the enemy had marched out of the village, and were taking their way down the course of the stream. Another large body, he said, was advancing by the high road in the same direction; and, as I doubted not now that the lights which the sentry had seen towards the north-west had been a third division following the road from Châtillon, it seemed clear that the enemy's whole force were advancing upon the quarters of the Maréchal de Hocquincourt at Blênau. Instantly sending off a trooper with this intelligence to Monsieur de Turenne, and another to Monsieur de Hocquincourt with the same news—which last courier, by the way, I chose because he was famous for speed, I prepared to lead my troop into the valley, in order to take advantage of anything that might occur, rather choosing to risk a little without orders than to remain in inactivity. When I had proceeded half way down a steep and narrow lane, which conducted directly towards one of the gates of the park, I caught a glimpse of a large body of the enemy winding over a hill, which lay flat and dark against the sky, now faintly lighted by the beams of the rising moon. From what I saw, I concluded that it was their rear-guard which was thus accidentally exposed to my sight; but the moment after a dull reddish colour began to tinge the clouds just above the château of Virmont, growing brighter and brighter every moment, with a sort of flickering reflection, which showed that some large mass of buildings was on fire in that direction. The trees of the park prevented us from seeing what was the precise cause; but, filled with apprehension in regard to Mademoiselle de Villardin and good Father Ferdinand, I hurried our advance as much as the nature of the ground would admit, forded the river opposite the park, and, forcing the gate, which was locked, soon found myself in one of the alleys that led directly to the château.

The light we had seen no longer wanted any explanation. Through the long perspective of the trees I saw the house and all its offices in one general blaze, while on the terrace, in front of the château, a small body of infantry appeared, drawn up in military array, contemplating the spectacle which their own hands had produced. We were at such a distance, and the noise in the neighbourhood of the burning building was so great, that the enemy neither saw nor heard our first entrance into the park, although the bright light in which they stood enabled us to remark their movements as well as if it had been day. I had at this time about eighty men with me, almost everyone of them born in the neighbourhood; and well knowing what are the feelings of those who see the flame of warfare brought to their own homesteads, I merely said, "Now, my men, if you have the feelings of men, follow me, to avenge your lord and your commander. You, Bourdon, lead your men round by the alley on the left, where they will not see you; I will take round by the right; and when we get to the sloping ground which leads up to the terrace, let us charge them on both flanks, and drive them into the flames they have kindled."

This plan was executed as soon as proposed. Bourdon, my lieutenant, led one half of the troop to the left of the terrace, at the same moment that I appeared on the other side; and, though the enemy had by this time become aware of our approach, and received us with a severe fire of musketry, we charged them with all the determination of hatred and revenge, and cut them down almost to a man. At that moment, however, an event occurred, which, in the passion and heat of the circumstances, I had not at all anticipated. A much larger body of infantry than that which had occupied the terrace drew out from the court behind, and I had just time to recognise in their commander my old enemy Gaspard de Belleville, when the word was given to fire. Ten or twelve of my men dropped round about me in a moment; a violent blow seemed to strike my right shoulder, and with a strange feeling of faintness I fell headlong from my horse. I made one ineffectual effort to rise; but as I did so, the terrace, the park, the conflict that was still going on, and the burning château, swam round and round before my eyes, the feeling of faint sickness increased more and more, and in another instant complete forgetfulness of everything came over me. Nearly two hours must have passed as I lay in this state; and when I recovered my senses, I found myself cast carelessly upon a baggage-waggon, stiff, bruised, and in great pain, though a number of bandages round my neck and shoulders showed me that I had been tended with some degree of care. It was still night, but there was a slight tinge of grey in the sky, which spoke that morning was not far distant, and by the noise of other waggons and the tramp of marching men, I judged that I was carried along with a retreating army. In the front part of the waggon, at a very short distance from me, sat a female figure, the countenance of which I could not distinguish in the darkness; but a groan breaking from my lips, as the jolts of the vehicle gave me a degree of agony indescribable, caused her to approach and take my head in her lap, adding a few words of comfort. The voice I recognised at once as that of Suzette, who had been the *servante* of Madame de Villardin; but it was so changed in its tone, so low and sad, that I was almost led to doubt whether my ear had not deceived me. A feeling of abhorrence towards the woman—excited certainly more by my suspicions than by my knowledge—would have made me shrink from her had it been possible. So weak, however, had I become that I could neither move hand nor foot, and the pain of the attempt only called another groan from my bosom, which drew her attention still more towards me. Whether she had any particular motive in the care she took of me, or whether it sprung alone from that tenderheartedness which even the worst of women feel on beholding suffering and distress, of course I could not tell; but, to do her but justice, she certainly tended me most kindly, and just as day was breaking we found ourselves at the little town of Château Renard. Here she descended from the waggon, and was giving directions to the drivers to lift me gently into a little auberge, when Gaspard de Belleville himself, riding up at full speed, caught her by the shoulder, and giving her a rude shake, exclaimed, "Get up, get up! You are not going to halt here!" and then, turning to the waggoners, he cursed them brutally for having paused at all, ordering them to make all speed onward towards Champagne.

"What in the devil's name have you there?" he exclaimed, pointing towards me, whose face he could not very well see.

"Only a wounded officer," replied Suzette.

"And what business has a wounded officer on your waggon?" cried he, sharply; "but get up, get up, and lose no time;" and riding on to the waggons which had preceded us, and which had likewise halted, he apparently gave more particular orders, and then galloped back, calling to Suzette as he passed to make the best of her way to Marou, and wait his coming there.

As I had never heard of Marou in my life, I was of course at a loss to know in what direction I was about to be borne; but, to tell the truth, in the state of feebleness and pain in which I then was, I cared so little what became of me, that I did not give the matter a second thought. The waggon rolled on; but, at a little village, about five miles farther on, we were obliged to pause till fresh horses could be procured; and, as this was not to be done without compulsion, a good deal of time was lost, while, lying on the top of the packages with which the vehicle was loaded, wounded, exhausted, and feverish, I suffered more than it is possible to describe. It luckily happened that the sky was dull and cloudy; for had it been one of those hot oppressive days which are sometimes met with in April, I do not think I should have been alive at night. Suzette, however, was kinder than I imagined she could have been, brought me drink several times to assuage the burning thirst that now consumed me, assured me that before night I should have a surgeon to dress my wounds, and did all in her power to keep up my spirits and to soothe my pain. A change had apparently taken place in her feelings since last I had beheld her, and a change had also taken place in her appearance, for I saw—and remembered afterwards, though it made but little impression on my mind at the time—that her dress was very different from that in which she had appeared in Bordeaux; and, indeed, the only mode of conveyance which was assigned to her would have rendered any other apparel than that of the simplest kind both ridiculous and cumbersome.

Through the whole of that day we travelled on, accompanied, as it appeared to me, by a small party of horse; but, nevertheless, Gaspard de Belleville did not again make his appearance, and towards night we halted at a village near Joigny. Here a surgeon was procured for me, who, though none of the best, contrived to extract the ball out of my side, after putting me to terrible torture for nearly half an hour. The relief, however, that I experienced was immediate; and, the wound being properly dressed, I fell sound asleep, even before I was removed from the table on which the operation had been performed. The next morning early I found Suzette again by the side of the straw-bed on which I was stretched; and by this time I had recovered sufficient strength to ask her what had become of Father Ferdinand and Mademoiselle de Villardin, when the château of Virmont had been burned. She replied, that she could not tell, as she had not come up till afterwards; and she added, at the same time, an injunction not to trouble myself about other people, but to keep as quiet as circumstances would permit, out of consideration for myself.

This warning was uttered with a touch of that flippancy which had been her characteristic while in the service of Madame de Villardin, but it was the only remaining trait of the kind that I now remarked. It was sufficient, however, to make me turn from her again in some degree of disgust, by awakening all the memories of the past; but she did not seem to perceive any emotion of the sort, and the party being once more prepared to set out, I was again placed on the waggon, though a pile of straw had been spread to form a sort of bed for me on the top of the packages, and a piece of canvas had been drawn across as an awning for my head. Another day's journey brought us about twenty miles further in Champagne, and towards four o'clock, the waggon in which I was placed stopped at the turning of a cross-road, near which was a farm-house. A number of the peasants were called up to the side of the vehicle; and under the directions of Suzette, several of the packages which it contained were carried down the road. A couple of planks were then procured, and, being tied together, I was placed thereon, and lifted up from the ground by four stout men, who proceeded to bear me in the direction which those who carried the baggage had already taken. At the distance of about a mile and a half from the high road we came to a house, which, though distinguishable in every respect from a farm, did not at all deserve the name of a château. It was, indeed, one of those dwellings which, at that time, were commonly called in France a *gentilhommière*, and which were generally inhabited by persons of gentle birth but small fortunes, who, after having served in the army the customary five or six years, retired to fit their younger children for becoming lawyers, abbés, and soldiers of fortune, while the heir to the estate prepared to tread exactly in his father's footsteps, and follow the same laudable and quiet path.

Up the steps of this building was I carried by my sturdy bearers, and in the hall I found Suzette, who had preceded us by some minutes, giving orders for my accommodation to two or three servants, male and female, who called her Madame, and acknowledged her commands as those of their mistress. Carried into a neat small chamber on the ground floor, I was undressed by the hands of the lacquey, and put to bed. In a few hours more a surgeon visited me, and I saw no one else but himself and the servant for two or three days, except when, once every morning, Suzette visited my bedside, asked briefly whether I was getting better, and left me as soon as I had replied.

On the fourth day, however, when she appeared, she sat down by my bed-side, and, instead of addressing me in the usual hurried manner, she paused thoughtfully, and looked anxiously in my face, even before she enquired after my health. Her whole manner, indeed, was absent and agitated; and after two or three remarks on indifferent subjects, she said abruptly, "I have something to tell you, Monsieur Hall, which *must* be told, and which *shall* be told, though I had intended to wait for two or three days longer, till you were well enough to hear it, and I had got courage enough to tell it; but he is coming home to-morrow, and heaven knows, if I do not tell it now, whether I shall ever be permitted to tell it at all."

As there was much that she had in her power to communicate which I would have given my right hand to hear, I assured her, that I was quite well enough to attend to and remember everything she might say. She hesitated, however, long, although it was evident that it was the question how to tell her tale, not any doubt in regard to telling it, that embarrassed her; and, after beginning and breaking off at least twenty times, she at length summoned courage, and proceeded with her story as follows:—

SUZETTE'S CONFESSION.

"I must make what I have to say a sort of history," she said, "in order that you may understand me clearly. In my early life you, of course, will find no manner of interest, and I shall therefore only tell you, as some excuse for much that happened after, that both my parents died young, and left me, before my education had commenced, to the care of a brother, who, though a daring, clever, courageous young man, was wild, obstinate, and headstrong himself, and, therefore, but little fitted to guide or direct me. He served early in various capacities in the navy; but as he never thought of saving anything which might have put us in a better station in life, the best that he could do for me was to fit me for the station of waiting-woman to a lady of high rank, and to obtain for me that situation in the family of Madame de Villardin. I followed my mistress to Paris, where I learnt from other women in the same situation all that is bad and foolish in the character of a Parisian soubrette, and added a vast quantity of conceit and obstinacy of my own. My mistress was gay and light, but in those respects she was not more so than every other woman in Paris, while, at the same time, she differed from all of them in never suffering herself to believe that it was possible to wrong her husband, even by a thought. This purity of mind, however, which should have made me admire and love her, had, I am sorry to say, quite the contrary effect. Almost every other suivante with whom I was acquainted in Paris was the confidante of her mistress and the depositary of a number of secrets which would not have well suited the public eye. I had learned, too, from the femme-de-chambre of Madame de Montbazon and several others, that a woman was never sure of her place, secure of her perquisites, or, in short, was half so well treated, as when her mistress was engaged in some affair which put her in a degree into the power of her soubrette. Thus those qualities in Madame de Villardin which best entitled her to respect and affection produced quite a different result with me. I confess, too, that I often did my best, as far as I could, without ruining myself in her opinion, to lead her to follow the example set her by so many of her friends and acquaintances; but though at first this would have appeared an easy task, from her apparent thoughtlessness and great love of admiration, yet I found that the endeavour was in vain, and I soon learned that if I risked any bold counsel of the kind I should soon be dismissed in disgrace.

"About that time Monsieur de Belleville, the only son of the gentleman to whom this property then belonged, was admitted, as a great favour, amongst the pages of Monsieur de Villardin. He was but fifteen, and I was twenty; he was the son of a gentleman, I of the class bourgeoise; but, notwithstanding all these obstacles, I determined, from the moment that he entered the family, to make it my business so to captivate him as to relieve myself from a situation that I detested by becoming his wife. To obtain this end there were few things that I would not have done, and I soon found that, thanks to his natural disposition and my own address, I was very likely to succeed as soon as Monsieur de Villardin obtained for him that commission which it was understood he was to receive at the age of seventeen or eighteen.

"Such was the state of things when you entered the dwelling of Monsieur de Villardin, and some quarrel took place between you and Gaspard, which ended in his conceiving a hatred for you, which never was, and never will be, quenched. He, of course, communicated his hatred to me, and more than one scheme did we form between us for the purpose of compelling you to quit the dwelling that we inhabited. This was the extent of our design at first, but it soon spread out to baser and more criminal purposes, which, for motives that I may hereafter explain, I am now about to reveal to you fully. The high estimation in which you were held by Monsieur de Villardin of course acted upon Gaspard in adding envy to dislike; but before two months were over he found an opportunity of gratifying both, which he did not fail to seize. You communicated one day, it seems, to Monsieur de Villardin, in his presence, that you had rescued a man from the gallows, and, without well knowing whether the consequence would be your own death in place of the malefactor, or your imprisonment in the Bastile for life, he found means of informing against you that very night, and had you not been promptly sent from Paris you would have been arrested the next morning.

"About that time the Count de Mesnil first began to visit at the hotel of Monsieur de Villardin, and I soon saw that regard for his friend was rapidly giving place to admiration for his friend's wife; and, of course, I had no objection to promote his views, though I perceived from the first that Madame de Villardin looked upon him with, if anything, less complacency than she did upon the other gentlemen who frequented our house. As I knew, however, that the estates of Monsieur de Mesnil were in the immediate vicinity of those belonging to Monsieur de Villardin in Brittany, and as my brother, whom I was very anxious to see, and whom I truly loved, was in that province, I determined to try whether I could not bring about a removal of the whole family thither; and, taking advantage of Monsieur de Villardin's jealousy, which I had long marked as an engine to be made use of in case of necessity, I contrived, by a few well-directed hints and words, to make him quit Paris in haste, and proceed to the Près Vallée. His jealousy, indeed, went farther than I had intended; and he was foolish enough to give way to a vehement fit of passion with his wife, which inflicted the first deep and painful stroke upon her domestic happiness. Although I had not intended this, I confess it did not give me any great pain, for I sincerely disliked my mistress, while affecting to be very much attached to her. In the meanwhile the hatred of Gaspard towards you increased rather than diminished, as well as his passion for myself, which had, by this time, become as ardent as I could desire it. Some of our love-meetings, however, in the woods of the Près Vallée, had, as it seemed, been observed by someone, who communicated the facts to the Duchess. She immediately spoke to me upon the subject, and that in too severe a manner to be forgotten or forgiven by one of my disposition. On her accusing me of lightness of conduct towards a boy like Gaspard, I replied, 'What if he choose to marry me?' But this only called down upon me a more severe reproof; and she pointed out the difference of age and station in such a tone as made my blood boil, adding that if ever I were seen walking with him again, she would instantly communicate the whole affair to Monsieur de Villardin, and at once dismiss me from her service. Of all this I, of course, informed Gaspard, and our prejudice against you led us to conclude, though I now know that we did so erroneously, that you had acted as a spy upon our conduct. The consequence was that we determined upon a plan, the object of which was at once to revenge ourselves upon you and upon my mistress. I must not paint myself or him, however, in worse colours than we deserve, and I must say that we neither of us contemplated the full extent of evil that was likely to ensue from the very designs that we formed. Neither Gaspard nor myself had ever received any strict or powerful principles, and, therefore, much that was really wrong we did not regard as any evil, while that which we really did know to be improper our passions induced us to undertake at all risks. The plan which we formed I will now tell you. But you are fatigued," she added, "and the surgeon warned me to keep you from all conversation. I am obliged, indeed, to disobey his directions, for I shall have no other opportunity than that afforded me by to-day to relate to you events which you must promise me faithfully to recapitulate, word for word, as far as you can remember, to Monsieur de Villardin. However, to-day is still ours, and as you are now fatigued, I will leave you for a couple of hours, and finish my story when I return."

I would fain have persuaded her to conclude it at once, and endeavoured to make her believe that I was really not fatigued; but I rather imagine that my appearance contradicted the assertion, and, adhering to her determination, she left me to repose.

CHAPTER XXV.

It may be easily conceived, that every word I had just heard had interested me deeply, and Suzette might certainly have continued her history, without agitating me more than my own thoughts did while she was absent. I counted every moment till her return; and when at length she reappeared, I eagerly besought her to proceed with her explanation, which she did at once, in a brief—even abrupt style, that led me to imagine that she was under the constant apprehension of interruption.

"As I had anticipated," she continued, "the Count de Mesnil was not long in following us into Brittany; and, having seen how easily the mind of Monsieur de Villardin was to be worked upon, Gaspard and myself determined, as we could not render the Duchess guilty, to render her husband jealous. Nor did we now seek to do so incompletely, by raising vague suspicions, but we proposed to give him such evidence of the conduct of Madame de Villardin, and of your connivance in the views of the Count de Mesnil, that we should rid ourselves of you for ever, place the Duke entirely in our power, and gain the highest place in the confidence of our lord.

"Monsieur de Mesnil was not at all unaware of the influence of the maid in such pursuits as that in which he was then engaged; and, on his first visit to the Près Vallée, he found an opportunity of holding a long conference with me, the result of which was no small increase of hope on his part, and considerable profits on mine. Although he was, it is true, one of those men who call themselves men of pleasure, and who make intrigue not only a business, but a toilsome one, in the present instance I found that he had been drawn beyond all cold calculations, and that he was certainly in love, as deeply and passionately as any boy. He besought me, eagerly and anxiously, to obtain for him but a lock of my mistress's hair; and of course this was no very difficult undertaking. The lock was easily cut away unperceived while I was superintending her toilet; and, having enclosed it in the locket which the Count had given me for the purpose, I took the liberty of adding thereto part of a broad blue riband which my mistress had bought just before we quitted Paris: trusting that the ingenuity of Gaspard and myself would easily find some means of bringing these objects under the notice of Monsieur de Villardin. The next thing was, if possible, to make you the bearer of the packet to Monsieur de Mesnil; and Gaspard caused one of the younger pages to give the locket itself, carefully wrapped in numerous envelopes, into your hands, begging you, the first time you passed in hunting near the château of the Count, to deliver it to his intendant. The outer paper was addressed to the intendant, the inner bore the superscription of Monsieur de Mesnil, written in a hand as nearly similar to that of the Duchess as I could make it. The boy who gave it to you was told, in case of after-enquiry on the part of Monsieur de Villardin, to say boldly that Gaspard gave it him; Gaspard was to put it upon me, and I was at once to avow that I had received the packet from Madame de Villardin, each declaring our ignorance of the contents; but Gaspard vowing that he had heard the Duchess direct me to place it carefully in your hands, as you would know what to do with it. In addition to this I was to excuse my not having given it to you myself, on the score of my dislike to you; and Gaspard was to make the same apology, adding, that he had seen too much of your cogging with Monsieur de Mesnil, to have anything to do with the business. The next part of our plan was to have you so well watched, that we should obtain information of when you were likely to deliver the packet, which we well knew you would do boldly and without concealment; and then to excite the suspicions of the Duke, who, we doubted not, would instantly stop the packet and examine its contents.

"Such was the scheme we formed, adding thereto a thousand minor touches, in order to make every part tell against you and the Duchess; but the impatience of the Count de Mesnil ruined all. He returned to the Près Vallée the very day after you had received the commission, and, taking me off my guard, led me foolishly to acknowledge that I had obtained the lock of hair he sought. Under those circumstances, there was nothing farther to be done than to get the packet out of your hands, which was effected by means of the boy who had given it to you; and the Count —who on that occasion stayed three days at the château—received it with bold delight and gratitude, of which last affection I received golden proofs. On the very day of his departure, Gaspard discovered that the Duke was called to Rennes on business which would detain him in that city many hours; and of course, through my intervention, this piece of news was communicated to Monsieur de Mesnil before he took his leave. He did not inform me what use he intended to make of these tidings; but I took good care to see that all doors were open, and the two younger pages out of the way. About half-an-hour after the Duke's departure for Rennes, I saw the Count approaching on foot; and, turning from the window to my embroidery, I left the rest to take its course.

"In less than ten minutes the Duchess entered her chamber, with her cheek flushed, and her eye flashing, and I easily discovered, from her whole appearance, that Monsieur de Mesnil had received a rebuff, for which I determined to console him by calling to his mind all that perseverance can do with woman. In this purpose, however, I was disappointed, for I never saw the Count again. I suspect," she added, gazing on me steadily, "that you could tell more in regard to that affair!—but no matter; I am making a confession, not receiving one.—Shortly after the disappearance of the Count de Mesnil, Monsieur de Villardin sent for me one evening, and directed me to obtain for him, without appearing to do so, a lock of his lady's hair; but conscience making me think he suspected what I had done, I cried, 'Lord, sir, it is impossible, without her discovering me!' Nothing I could have said would have tended more to aggravate his suspicions in regard to his wife, and he bade me, sharply, do as he directed, whether she discovered me or not. His orders were obeyed without difficulty, and the same night I gave him a small portion of the Duchess's hair, which I assured him was all that I could obtain without being found out. He took it eagerly, and forgetting, in his jealous vehemence, that I was in the room, he drew forth a locket and a riband, which showed me plainly enough that he at least must have seen Monsieur de Mesnil since I had set eyes upon him. He caught me gazing at the locket as he compared the hair within it with that he held in his hand, and angrily bade me quit the room; but the discovery did no harm to our plans, for once having suffered his feelings to appear before me, he was less scrupulous afterwards in questioning me upon the subject. Gaspard was the agent by whom I was generally called to his presence, and while we left his suspicions against our lady in the same state as we found them, we endeavoured, as far as we could, to inculpate you, and to make him believe that you had been a confidant and a favourite of the Count de Mesnil. In this, however, we were always frustrated; and seeing that there were facts within his own knowledge, which rendered our most artful insinuations in regard to you ineffectual, we were, of course, obliged to proceed carefully.

After our change of residence, however, and the fresh degree of favour you acquired at Dumont, we determined upon laying some new scheme for your destruction. Madame de Villardin I thought had been punished enough, and I began almost to be sorry that I had done as I had done; for I believe a woman is never altogether without compassion for the sorrows of a woman, unless she be jealous of her. I saw peace and a certain degree of happiness restored between the Duke and his wife after the arrival of Father Ferdinand, with more satisfaction than I had imagined I could have done a month before; but Gaspard felt differently, and was continually urging me to proceed with our former plans, and still endeavour to rouse the suspicions of the Duke against you in regard to the Count de Mesnil, asking whether I could not place some of the riband which had been attached to the locket into your apartments; and suggesting many another scheme of the kind. I resisted, however, till at length one unfortunate evening we were seen together, walking after dark in the park, with my arm clasped in his, and his arm round my waist. The next day the Duchess again spoke to me in even more severe terms than before, and told me that I must prepare to leave her service at the expiration of a month. My resolution was now taken. I soothed, flattered, lamented, expressed my contrition, and promised a different conduct; but still she adhered to her determination, though at the same time she assured me that she would take care to place me well in Paris. Affecting to forget all her severity, I the next day engaged her in the examination of her wardrobe; and taking care to fix her attention particularly on that fatal blue riband which had been curtailed by my hands in order to attach a part of it to the locket, I made a sudden pretext to leave her, ran to Monsieur de Villardin, and told him that I felt it my duty to acknowledge that I had just seen in the hands of my lady a part of the very same riband which I had once beheld in his own, fixed to a locket that seemed to give him great uneasiness. He scarcely heard half I said, but, flying to his wife's dressing-room, gave way to a fit of passion which was fearful even to me. The result you well know, and probably are better acquainted with many of the particulars than I am. All I will say on that score," she added, somewhat sternly, "is, that it was a strange thing a bridge which had borne horses three or four days before, should give way under the weight of two people on foot.—Do you think, young gentleman, that the weight of Monsieur de Villardin's suspicions, and of the Duchess's sorrows, was sufficient to break it down?—However, if you had any hand in that deed too, my confession may make you feel some part of the remorse that I have felt since."

"In regard to the matter you speak of," I replied, "I know no more than you do. It was extraordinary that the bridge should break; but yet such circumstances have happened before, and will again, without anyone being able to tell why the structure that was firm at one moment should give way the next."

She shook her head doubtingly, and then went on:—"I have now told you all that matters much for you to hear, and you must promise me to repeat the whole to Monsieur de Villardin, word for word, as far as you can recollect it."

"I do not well see," I replied, "what object is to be gained by doing so. The Duchess is dead; his suspicions were unjust; and I see no reason why I should wring his heart by recalling events to his memory, of which time itself has scarcely been able to soften the remembrance."

"If you do not tell him," she cried, vehemently, "you shall not return to him for years. But stay," she added, perhaps recollecting that I was not easily moved by threats; "have you so little the feelings of honour, so small a portion of chivalrous spirit, as not to think it worth while to clear the reputation of an injured lady, even though she be dead?"

"I certainly should think it worth while," I replied, "did her reputation require any defence, even to her husband: but such is not the case; and at this moment, Monsieur de Villardin is as completely convinced of his wife's innocence as you have ever been."

"Indeed!" she replied, "indeed!" and gazing on my countenance for a moment or two with a look in which surprise was mingled in some degree with disappointment, she repeated more than once the word "indeed!" The instant after, she added, however, "Still you must tell him what I have said, for the mind of a suspicious man can never have too conclusive an evidence to remove his doubts; and if there be one point left uncleared, suspicion will hang round it still, and haunt him to his very last day."

I knew what she said to be true; but her eagerness in the business, joined with the traits of art and deceit which she had just before acknowledged, made me also suspicious of her motives; and as I did not wish, without cause, to be the instrument of inflicting deep pain on Monsieur de Villardin, I resolved not to undertake the commission, till she had explained the anxiety she manifested to induce me to do so. "If you will tell me," I replied, "what are your real motives, and why you cannot make this confession by letter as well as by my intervention, I will undertake what you desire, should I find your explanation satisfy me; but I will undertake it on no other terms; and should you wish to communicate farther with Monsieur de Villardin, you must do so in writing."

"My heart is better than you think it, young gentleman," she answered, somewhat bitterly; "but I forgive your doubts; for my conduct was evil enough when you knew me, and I fear is not over good even now. However, my motives for desiring you to bear this confession to Monsieur de Villardin, and for not trusting it to a common letter, are easily explained. You can choose the moment and manner of making the communication, and I do not seek to pain, any more than necessary, one I have already pained too much. In the next place, my letter might never reach him; for though I seem to command all here, in some things I am watched as closely as a prisoner. The letter, too, might, and probably would, fall into the hands of one who would inflict upon me a bitter enough punishment for the crime of having written it; and therefore it is that I choose this means rather than another. As to why I make the confession at all, if you still need other motives, I can give you many; but you are too fatigued to hear them."

I assured her that such was not the case, and begged her, if she were really sincere, to assign the true causes for her conduct, in which case I promised to do exactly as she would have me.

"Well then," she said, "you must hear out my story, and it shall not be a long one. When I was dismissed from Dumont in disgrace, I retired to the little neighbouring town of St. Etienne, whence I wrote immediately to Gaspard de Belleville, who came to see me that night, and desired me to remain tranquilly where I was, as, beyond doubt, Monsieur de Villardin would soon obtain for him a commission, which he had long been of an age to hold. From him I learned that the information which had first caused my disgrace with my mistress, and had afterwards ruined me with the Duke, had not been given by you, as we had suspected, but by Jerome, the old major-domo. I found, however, that Gaspard had luckily escaped his lord's indignation; and, as a consequence of all this, I remained at St. Etienne, in some degree of concealment, it is true, but in great tranquillity regarding the result, as I saw that no separation was likely to take place between myself and Gaspard, which could diminish his passion, or thwart my schemes respecting him. Suddenly, however, about four days after my dismissal, Gaspard himself appeared on horseback, and in a hurried manner informed me that he was about to set off instantly for Bordeaux, bearing letters from Monsieur de Villardin to the Duc de Bouillon, in whose regiment he was immediately to have a commission. He offered, at the same time, to take me with him, if I would consent, and to endeavour to obtain his father's permission to marry me, after we had arrived at Guienne. Hitherto I had always wisely avoided putting myself in any degree in his power, but now the fear of seeing all my plans overturned by his removal from my influence, joined to his entreaties and persuasions, induced me weakly to consent, and that very night we set out together for Bordeaux. Monsieur de Villardin had liberally supplied my lover with the money necessary both to perform the journey to Bordeaux, and to meet all the first expenses of two years' service in the regiment of Monsieur de Bouillon, without trusting at all to his pay. I myself also had accumulated no small sum during the five or six years I had remained with the Duchess; so that, on our arrival, we found ourselves enabled to live, not only in comfort, but in profusion. Splendour, dress, and admiration became my passion; but the arrival of Monsieur de Villardin and yourself, about a month afterwards, soon obliged me to seek retirement once more. Although I felt the necessity, for the sake of Gaspard's interests, of concealing my connection with him from his former lord, yet my meeting with you in the streets of Bordeaux was not displeasing to me, as I felt a degree of amusement in fancying that I had dazzled you with the splendour of my appearance. As soon as the gates of the city were opened, after the conclusion of the siege, Gaspard, who was left behind by Monsieur de Bouillon, to make a great number of arrangements which the Duke himself had not time to complete, received intelligence of his father's death, and I instantly pressed him to perform his promise, and legitimate our union by marriage. Gaspard, however, by this time had acquired new ideas from his commune with the world; and he evaded my request in such a manner as to leave very little doubt upon my mind in regard to his determination of breaking his promise. This opened my eyes to my weakness, and a fit of illness followed, which, though but of short duration, yet had the good effect of making me think very bitterly of many things that I had done. A good priest of the city took advantage of my state of mind to direct my repentance aright, and made me promise, ere he would grant me absolution, that on the very first opportunity I would clear the character of Madame de Villardin in the eyes of her husband. I forgot this promise, it is true, in after events, but I remember it now, and seek to fulfil it. In the meantime Gaspard became alarmed at my situation, and all his former tenderness returned; but still, I am sure that he would have evaded the fulfilment of his promise, had not a circumstance fortunately occurred to change my situation in regard to him.

"After your departure from Bordeaux, it became no longer necessary for me to use any concealment, and my *loup* was very generally laid aside. Thus it happened that I was walking with Gaspard, without any covering to my face, one day shortly after my recovery, when to my surprise, upon the bank of the river, I was suddenly met by my brother, whom I had not seen for several years, nor heard of at all since I returned to Brittany. I was recognised by him instantly, notwithstanding my fine apparel; though, to say the truth, the splendour of his own appearance had almost made me doubt his identity. He embraced me tenderly; and the questions he asked concerning myself and Madame de Villardin, as well as the brief account he gave me of his late adventures at sea, and of his having been driven by stress of weather into the Gironde, where he had little expected to find me, soon disclosed our relationship to Gaspard, who had often heard me tell tales of my brother's fierceness and prowess, which did not render the rencontre very palatable to him. It was even, I confess, somewhat terrific to myself; and when my brother asked who that gentleman was on whose arm I was leaning, and boldly concluded that it was my husband, I thought I should have fainted. Our silence and our confusion soon made him aware of our relative situation; and the moment he became so, he touched the hilt of his sword slightly with the forefinger of his right hand, saying, in a tone that was not to be mistaken, 'Be so good as to follow me, sir; that lady will be able to find her way home by herself; nor shall I have any difficulty in discovering her abode, after I have done with you.' Gaspard looked down and hesitated, although his honour as a soldier was concerned; and my brother was beginning to speak more loudly, and in a tone which might have called general attention upon us, when my lover replied, 'Have but a moment's patience, sir, and I think I can give you such an explanation of this business as will prove satisfactory to you.' He then bade me return home, whispering that no harm would happen, and left me, while he walked on with my brother towards the Chartreux.

"I returned immediately to our lodgings, where I remained in very great anxiety for nearly two hours; but at the end of that time, my lover and my brother returned, accompanied by a priest, who asked me a number of questions in regard to my own and Gaspard's freedom from all ties; and at length being satisfied, accompanied us to a neighbouring church, and pronounced the nuptial benediction.

"What might have been the consequences had we remained unmarried, I cannot tell; but since the ceremony, a rapid, though gradual, decrease of all sort of kindness has taken place on the part of my husband. Rude and brutal usage is now all that I receive from him; and though Heaven knows he is in no degree jealous, yet I one day unfortunately said a few words which have made him, during the whole of the last campaign, drag me about with him from place to place; and never, till the last affair at Virmont, has he suffered me to be out of his sight for a day together. The fact is that, wearied with his ill-usage, and seeing that patience and forbearance did nothing to remove it, I determined to try if I could not influence his fears, and took a solemn vow in his presence that, if he did not change his conduct, I would reveal all I knew to Monsieur de Villardin, of whom he still stands in great dread. The threat had the effect for some time; but not being able to conquer his morose and vindictive temper, he soon relapsed into greater unkindness than ever; and to prevent me putting in execution what I menaced, he will not suffer any of the servants even to deliver to the couriers a letter, the contents of which he has not seen. Ever since he has kept me in his sight, treating me with cruelty and rudeness on all occasions; and even when, by order of the Prince de Condé, every sort of incumbrance was sent away from the army at Montargis and Château Renard, he gave me in charge to a party from his company, with strict orders not to suffer me to pause, or quit the direct road, till I reached this place, which is the dwelling he inherited from his father. He it was who prompted me first to retaliate upon others any pain that was inflicted upon myself; and though I certainly should not accuse him, did not other motives combine to make me reveal all to Monsieur de Villardin, yet in doing so I but make him reap the fruits of that which he himself has taught.

"You have now three motives assigned you in explanation of my conduct: in the first place, my promise to the priest at Bordeaux; in the next place, the sincere desire of clearing every shadow away from the character of a virtuous lady, whom I wronged and traduced; and in the third place, my determination to punish a man who ill-treats me, and whom," she added, with set teeth and a flashing eye, "and whom I hate from the bottom of my heart. I have another motive," she proceeded, after giving way to this burst of passion, "I have another motive, too, but it I will not tell to anyone. This, however, I solemnly declare, as I hope for salvation, that very motive involves more than any other thing the desire of truly serving Monsieur de Villardin, and of doing that for which he himself hereafter may bless me. Now are you satisfied?"

"I am," I replied, "and will certainly undertake the task, if ever I recover; but to put the matter beyond all doubt in the mind of Monsieur de Villardin, to-morrow you must give me a note to him, under your own hand, desiring him to believe fully all that I shall tell him in regard to your conduct towards Madame de Villardin."

"Not to-morrow!" she said, "not to-morrow! This very night, or it will be too late, I will write it in a moment:" and she left me abruptly to execute what she proposed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

In a few minutes Suzette returned, and gave me a billet, signed with her name, in the course of which she prayed Monsieur de Villardin to believe all that I should tell him in regard to his unhappy wife. She seemed anxious now to leave me, and to drop the conversation; but I detained her for a short time, to explain to me how and where she had found me on the night that I had received my wound; and she was in the act of telling me, hurriedly, that it was by mere accident, when steps sounded in the saloon which opened into my apartment, and she started up with evident marks of alarm.

Her apprehensions were not without cause, for she had not time to quit the room, ere Gaspard de Belleville entered, booted and spurred as he had dismounted, and after giving a glance towards my bed, which evidently showed him who it was that had been the object of his wife's care, he struck the unhappy woman a blow with his open hand that made her reel, asking her how she dared to bring one of the enemy within his doors.

I was in no condition to offer her any protection, but a person who had followed Gaspard into the apartment, though he did not very decidedly resent the blow, interposed to prevent another, and, taking her by the hand, he led her weeping to the door, saying, at the same time, "Come, come, Monsieur de Belleville, you must not strike a woman, and that woman my sister!"

As soon as he had led Suzette out of the room, her brother returned, and approaching her husband—who stood gazing upon me in sullen silence, from which I augured no very hospitable treatment—he turned his face full upon me also, when, not a little to my surprise, I recognised in Suzette's brother my old acquaintance Captain Hubert, of whose achievements in the forest I had been a witness, and nearly a victim.

He was, evidently, not much slower in his recognition than myself, and although I had given him sufficient proofs of my discretion in regard to one of his professions, yet the exclamation of "Diable!" which broke from him before he was aware, showed me that he did not yet feel safe, and would willingly have avoided any fresh rencontre with such an inconvenient acquaintance.

The prospects which my situation afforded were certainly not very consolatory at that moment. There I lay, incapable of offering resistance or of attempting escape, in the presence of two men, one of whom hated me with a good old inveterate enmity, which was quite sufficiently mature to bear fruits of as bitter a kind as heart could desire; while the other knew his life and reputation to be in my power the moment that I issued forth from those walls. I had also enjoyed the means of learning by experience that neither of these worthy personages were very scrupulous as to their actions; and, certainly, if ever I calculated fully and seriously upon having my throat cut in cold blood, it was at that moment.

I took good care, however, not to make the matter quite certain by claiming any acquaintance with Captain Hubert, while at the same time I resolved to treat Gaspard de Belleville, whom I looked upon, after all, as the worst of the two, in the same manner that I would have treated any other officer in the service of the Prince de Condé.

"Monsieur de Belleville," I said, after having given him plenty of time to speak, without his uttering one word, "I claim your protection and hospitality as an officer and a gentleman; and I beg, also, that you will have the goodness, if the armies are in this vicinity, to send a trumpet to Monsieur de Villardin, or to Monsieur de Turenne, informing either of them that I am a prisoner in your hands, and requesting them to negotiate my liberation."

The impudence of the request seemed to strike him dumb; and after staring at me for a minute longer, with a curling lip and contracted brow, he turned upon his heel, and taking his brother-in-law by the arm, walked out of the room without saying one word, shutting and locking the door behind him.

That I was not numbered with my fathers that very night was probably owing to two or three circumstances, which, affecting the brothers-in-law differently, prevented them from doing together what each separately might have been very desirous of executing. In the first place, my residence in his house was known to too many people for Gaspard to put me out of the way without a great chance of discovery; and it is also probable that he did not at that time know how easy and unceremonious Suzette's brother was in the disposal of obnoxious personages. On his part, Captain Hubert had some touch of humanity in his nature, and though the dislike which every man must feel to living in a state of apprehension might have made him forget his better nature, yet, as Gaspard was not aware of all his worthy relative's former occupations, and it would have been necessary to communicate them to him, in order to arrange my destruction as a joint enterprise, there can be no doubt that the Captain was wise in refraining. Indeed, it is more than probable that he looked upon me at that period as a safer depositary of his secret than his brother-in-law would have been; and I think he was right; for no man that I know was more likely to use an advantage ungenerously than Gaspard de Belleville.

These motives I have only, of course, assigned upon guess; but they were the fruits of my reflections after I was left alone, and very much they certainly did console me, as I lay helpless enough in the house of my bitter enemy, with the door locked upon me, and no means of making my situation known to any friend in the world. Many a time, however, did I wish that Suzette had left me where she found me, to take my chance of death or recovery; but all such wishes were in vain, and, as the best thing I could do, I banished thought as soon as I could, and fell asleep, feeling at the same time very doubtful as to what world I should wake in when I next opened my eyes.

No one, however, disturbed my slumber, and I was roused only by the daylight streaming into my room. I felt myself better and stronger for my long sleep, and much need, indeed, had I to be so, for after lying for two or three hours without anyone bringing me meat or drink, a trooper entered my room, and told me that I must get up, and dress myself. It was vain to resist, and therefore I made the attempt; but I was far too weak to accomplish the task myself; and it was only with the continual assistance of the soldier, who acted as a valet-de-chambre, that I was enabled to put on the same torn and bloody habiliments in which I had been brought thither.

When this unpleasant sort of toilet was completed, the progress of which had perfectly satisfied my attendant that I was not capable of walking even across the room, one of the servants was called in, and between him and the trooper I was carried out through the saloon into the court-yard, in which a light carriage, with two horses, was standing ready prepared. Although I was certainly not in the very best condition for travelling, yet, well knowing that opposition would be in vain, of course I offered none to the proceedings of those into whose hands I had fallen; and was speedily lifted into the chaise, without much ceremony or consideration. Gaspard de Belleville, however, seemed to think that my companions were showing me too much lenity, and I heard his voice from an upper window, ordering them, in no very measured terms, to put me in anyhow, and above all things to make haste.

As soon as I was finally thrust into the machine, the trooper got in beside me, the man who had aided to carry me took his seat on the coach-box, and away we went at a pace more fitted for a cavalry regiment at the charge than for the carriage of a wounded man. While undergoing the operation of being dressed I had discovered that the purse which was on my person when I was wounded, had, by some fortunate accident, been suffered to remain in my pocket; but this had been perceived by my new attendant also, and, though he did not absolutely transfer the purse at once from my hands to his own, he soon gave me notice that he intended to make a gradual appropriation of its contents. Beyond all doubt Gaspard de Belleville, who could not tell whether I had any money about me or not, had given the man a sufficient sum to defray his expenses on the road, and, equally beyond doubt, as the fellow was evidently a trooper in some regiment of horse, he was paid for his services as usual. Nevertheless, scarcely had we proceeded three miles when he informed me that Monsieur le Capitaine de Belleville expected me to discharge the score at all the cabarets where we stopped on the road, and likewise to give him, my guard and attendant, the reasonable sum of four crowns per diem for his good company and assistance.

Weak and uncomfortable as I was, this method of proceeding amused me. An English blackguard would have committed robbery, and taken the purse without more ado; the Frenchman, however, was more moderate, and contented himself with cheating me out of the greater part of its contents. Though the result appeared likely to be much the same, yet there were conveniences attending the Frenchman's mode of proceeding, of which I did not fail to take advantage; and representing to him civilly my weak state, and the pain and discomfort which I suffered from the furious jolting of the carriage at that quick rate of progression, I pointed out to him that the more days we were upon the journey the greater would be the amount of crowns to be given to him; and, having discovered that his orders were to carry me to Stenay, a town on the Meuse, belonging to the Prince de Condé, I did not scruple to assure him that, if he would turn the horses' heads the other way, and drive to the quarters of Monsieur de Turenne, wherever they might be, a thousand crowns and a sergeant's post in my troop should be his immediate reward.

The man expressed himself highly obliged by my polite offer, as he termed it, but informed me at the same time that he had three strong reasons for acting honestly in the present instance, and obeying the orders he had received. These were that, in the first place, he would in all probability be hanged if he went near the quarters of Monsieur de Turenne, as he had lately come over from his army to that of the Prince de Condé; in the next place, that the other party, to which he now belonged, might sooner or later hang him if he again changed sides; and lastly, that even if he could make up his mind to run all these risks, the man who was driving had his orders also, and would not suffer him to deviate from the prescribed route.

I could not help acknowledging that these were all potent reasons, and, as I saw that it would be in vain to combat their influence on his mind, I suffered myself to be rolled on towards Stenay, with no further discussion than merely what was necessary to induce my conductors to give me as much repose as possible. My brief communication with the trooper had, however, established a sort of friendly intercourse between us, which rendered him extremely civil during the rest of the journey; and from him I learned that, although Condé had completely defeated the Maréchal de Hocquincourt at Blênau, Turenne had, by the most splendid manœuvres that it is possible to conceive, arrested the progress of the victorious army with a force of not one-third its number. The Prince had himself turned his steps towards Paris, and Gaspard de Belleville, as well as several superior officers, had been left to bring up a number of scattered parties which had spread over a part of Champagne and the Orleanois, during the unsteady command of the Dukes of Beaufort and Nemours. He could tell me nothing, however, in regard to Monsieur de Villardin, his daughter, or Father Ferdinand, though he had been at no great distance, he said, from the château of Virmont at the time that it was fired, which was done, he declared, by the command of the Duke of Nemours, in order to give notice to another division of the army that the Prince was on his march. Notwithstanding this assurance of my companion, I could not help thinking that Gaspard de Belleville had fully as much to do with the conflagration as the Duke of Nemours.

Five days' journey brought us to Stenay, and in spite of my wounds and my weakness, thanks to a constitution of iron, and an early hardening in the fiery furnace of the English civil wars, I was far better at the end of the time than on the day when we first set out. After being admitted within the walls of the town, which was not permitted without manifold challenges and investigations, the carriage drove direct to the prison, where I was delivered into the hands of a man whose countenance was certainly as rugged as the stone walls amidst which he dwelt. Nor can I boast of having found his heart much softer; for, though the trooper who accompanied me had recommended me to his notice, in my hearing, as a *bon garçon*, no sooner were the doors closed upon me, than a course of ill-usage began which was not destined to terminate for some time. My purse, rendered meagre by the frequent demands of the road, was the first thing attacked, and from that moment vanished entirely. I was then thrust into one of the dungeons, with a pile of straw for a bed, and a little grated window of about nine inches square, looking out upon the ramparts, as my only source of light and air. Bread and water became my diet, and, as the floor of the dungeon was not particularly dry, it was with no small difficulty that I kept myself from the effects of the damp.

In reply to all my questions in regard to the authority by which I was there detained, the gaoler merely told me that I was considered as a deserter from the army of the Prince de Condé found fighting against him, and that I might think myself very well off that I had not been shot immediately. Although this was evidently a pretext, and I very well understood that both Gaspard de Belleville and good Captain Hubert might greatly approve of my detention, yet, I could not bring myself to believe that this state of things could continue long; and for the first two or three days of my imprisonment, I consoled myself with the expectation of its speedy termination. My health also, I must confess, improved greatly under the severe regimen to which I was subjected, and the healing of my wounds proceeded more rapidly than I could have at all anticipated. Nevertheless, as day went by after day, and no relief came, my spirits fell, and my heart, hitherto so buoyant under all the adversities and changes which I had met with, sunk oppressed beneath that most horrible of all inflictions, solitary confinement.

No language can describe in the slightest degree the state of my feelings in that prison, by the time that ten days had passed over my head within its walls. The lingering weariness of the moments, the faint chilness of apprehension, the utter vacuity of each heavy day, the changeless, unceasing poring of thought upon one subject, the want of every event, however small, the burning thirst for freedom, and activity, and change, and the fresh air, and the fair face of nature—all combined to make a state of existence which was the very essence of "hope delayed that maketh the heart sick."

Often—often I asked myself, when was this to end, or would it ever end? Put in there by two men, to one of whom my freedom might be dangerous, and to the other of whom anything which afflicted me would be delightful, how could I tell that I might not be kept there for years? In the state of the country at that time no investigation was ever likely to take place, no one would, in all probability, hear of my imprisonment, nobody would strive to obtain my release. Monsieur de Villardin, doubtless, by this time thought me dead, and I might feel perfectly sure that neither Gaspard de Belleville nor any of his household would suffer my situation to be known, so long as they could by any means conceal it. Such thoughts formed the only occupation for my mind, while I could neither find nor devise any other exercise for my limbs than that which could be obtained by traversing in every different direction a chamber of ten feet square. It is true I could occasionally hear the steps and voices of people without passing along the ramparts; but the little window was so high that I could not amuse myself by the view which it might otherwise have afforded, and the merry tones of people at large, as the wind brought them to my ear, seemed but a mockery of my solitude and captivity.

At length a slight change was afforded me, After I had lingered on in this manner for some months, the gaoler fell sick, and his wife brought me the daily loaf and pitcher of water in his place. She was not the most prepossessing person I ever beheld, it is true, but it is scarcely possible to describe the pleasure I felt at even seeing a new face. The joy that I expressed, it seems, melted her heart, and on the second day of her coming she brought me a meat meal, the first that I had tasted since I had entered the prison. Anything that was in the least degree new was, of course, delightful; but this mark of her kindness induced me to ask for more, and, showing her that it was perfectly impossible, from the size of the aperture, that I could escape by the window if I were permitted to reach it, I begged hard that she would let me have a chair, or a stool, or a table, in order to amuse myself by looking out. To this she consented, telling me, however, that she was sure her husband would take it away again, as soon as ever he was well enough to resume his official duties. Nevertheless, every day's amusement I looked upon as something gained; and in a few minutes after, she brought me a large settle, by means of which I instantly climbed up to the window and gazed out.

No words can express the delight which the first sight of the world without afforded me; and yet, strange and absurd as it may seem, this delight was occasioned by a prospect which did not extend to the space of two hundred yards in any direction. Underneath me were the ramparts, and beyond them again, in a straight line, were some other parts of the fortifications, which bounded my view in that direction: to the left was a square tower, projecting, I believe, from the body of the prison; and to the right, at the distance of about a hundred and fifty yards, were some sheds and houses which had encroached upon the defences of the place. But it was all something new,—something different from the black solitude of the dungeon,—something that I had not seen for months; and, consequently, it was all delightful. There was nobody to be seen upon the ramparts at the time I first looked out; but there was a man washing his face at a window of the house I have mentioned, and a cat creeping along with stealthy pace from tile to tile of the roof, in order to catch a sparrow that was perched upon the ridge; and it would seem childish and frivolous thus to dwell upon the pleasure with which I watched both of these very ordinary occurrences, did it not give some idea, though a very faint one, of the dull horror of that situation, compared to which such sights were the most enchanting visions.

Standing on my settle, I remained there for hours, and could almost have wept when the sun went down. With the first ray of morning I was again at my post, and remained there the greater part of that day, which, from what the gaoler's wife told me in regard to his convalescence, was the last that I could count upon for that indulgence. Few people, indeed, passed along the ramparts; but still every one that did so afforded me new pleasure. At length, towards evening, when I had got down for a few moments in order to rest myself, I caught the sound of several cheerful voices speaking; and, starting up again to my loophole, I soon saw four or five gentlemen coming round the angle of the projecting tower. They seemed officers belonging to the garrison; and as soon as I set eyes upon them I determined to endeavour to make my situation known to a party amongst whom, as officers and men of honour, I doubted not that I should find some one to compassionate my situation, and perhaps to afford me relief. Such being my resolution, it will be easy to conceive my joy when, as they approached, I perceived, in the person nearest to the prison, no other than Gourville, whom I had known and acted with in Paris.

"Monsieur de Gourville," I cried, "Monsieur de Gourville; stay a moment,—stay a moment and listen to me, for God's sake!"

I had forgot that he could not see me as well as I could see him; but, nevertheless, he paused and looked round, exclaiming, "Who called me?"

"It was I; it was Monsieur de Juvigny," I replied, giving myself the name by which he had known me in Paris; "stay, and speak to me for one moment."

"But where are you?" cried Gourville, looking up towards the aperture through which I spoke.

"Here in the prison," replied I; but ere I could add another word I found myself suddenly grasped by the arm, and thrown down upon the floor of the dungeon with a degree of violence which hurt me much in the fall, though my head luckily lighted on the straw which composed my bed. The first object on which my eyes lighted after my compelled descent was the grim and unshaved face of the gaoler, which, however, showed me, without further explanation, that my voice had been overheard by his jealous and watchful ear. He deigned no observation, but a few curses pretty equally divided between myself and his wife; and, snatching up the settle, he turned away from the dungeon and locked the door.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Although this was a sad and bitter disappointment to me, yet I could not help still entertaining a hope that I had made my situation sufficiently known to Gourville to urge him at least towards further enquiries; and with that thought I consoled myself for the rest of the evening. No one came, however; and, when the next day rose and set without the appearance of my acquaintance, I began again to give myself up to despair, the more dark for the ray of light that had broken in upon me for a time.

The sun rose and set, I have said; and, sitting down upon the straw which had been given me for my bed, I covered my eyes with my hands, and could have wept; but the very fountain of tears seemed dried up; and I could only brood over my situation with a sort of gloomy horror, which I do believe would have ended in depriving me of my faculties; but about an hour after nightfall the bolts and bars of the dungeon began to move, and I started up with joy; for the hour was not one at which the gaoler ever visited the cell: and the slightest change in the usual current of events seemed to speak of hope. As soon as the door was opened a light broke in from the turnkey's lantern, and his own face was the first thing I beheld; but the moment after I perceived another figure behind; and, to my inexpressible satisfaction, saw, as soon as my eyes were a little more accustomed to the light, that it was Gourville himself.

He embraced me most kindly; and, ordering the gaoler to leave us in a tone of authority which was instantly obeyed, he surveyed me from head to foot by the light of the lantern, which the man had set down on the floor of the dungeon ere he departed. My imprisonment and all its consequences had not improved my appearance particularly; and I saw a slight smile pass over Gourville's countenance as he made his examination, and contrasted, I daresay, in his mind the object that now met his eyes with the gay lad who had visited him in Paris several years before. He suppressed all signs of merriment, however, for fear of giving me pain; and then made me recount all the adventures which had brought me into that situation. In my narrative I certainly did not spare Gaspard de Belleville; but Gourville shook his head, saying that my enemy enjoyed a considerable share of favour with the Prince de Condé.

"Nevertheless," he continued, "beyond all doubt your liberation must and will take place as soon as it is communicated to the Prince. Sorry I am that I have not the power of ordering you to be set free at once; but as I depart for Paris early to-morrow, I will take care that his Highness shall immediately know the treatment you have received. In the meanwhile that treatment shall instantly be changed in some degree, for I have authority enough for that at least, and you shall have every comfort that ever exists in a prison. A little money, too, is not a useless thing in any situation. Here, take my purse, my young friend; you can pay me when we meet again."

I assured him that if I were permitted to write to Monsieur de Villardin I should soon receive sufficient supplies, and, therefore, that I needed not to take advantage of his liberal offer, if he could obtain for me that permission. He replied that he would take care that no obstruction should thenceforward be thrown in the way of my writing to whom I liked; but at the same time he pressed the loan of his purse upon me, saying, that I might want it before I could receive any reply to my letters. After some further conversation, which he, who well knew what imprisonment is, took care to make as cheerful as possible, he summoned the gaoler, and after rebuking him sternly for the treatment he had shown to an officer of the king, he ordered him to let me have everything which could make me comfortable, consistent with my safe custody, and especially both to furnish me with materials for writing, and to give the letters which I did write to the post with his own hands. By the gaoler's humble tone it was very evident that he well knew the influence which Gourville possessed with the Prince de Condé; and as soon as my kind friend had left me, he made a thousand excuses for his former harshness, telling me that he had but obeyed the orders of those who brought me thither.

A great change in my situation was the first result of Gourville's visit: I was removed to a warm and dry chamber, from which I could see over the whole country round. Good food, books, and writing materials were allowed me; and my gaoler, now become civil and complacent enough, purchased for me with part of the money which Gourville had lent various articles of clothing, of which I had long stood in need, and for which he did not charge me much more than double the value. My first care was to write to Monsieur de Villardin, and the gaoler undertook to see the epistle despatched; but certain it is the letter never reached its destination; and whether it remained for ever within the walls of the prison at Stenay, or lost itself when it got out into the wide world, I cannot tell. It mattered but little, however; for eight days after Gourville had left me, I was visited by one of the officers of the garrison, who informed me that he had received orders from the Prince de Condé to conduct me to Paris, and that if I had no objection, he proposed setting out the next day. I assured him that nothing on earth would give me greater pleasure; and a little after daybreak I had to thank God for seeing the gates of that accursed prison thrown open to give me egress. The officer and his party were waiting me in the street, with one led horse for myself, and another for my baggage; but as all the clothes I had were those which the gaoler had purchased for me, they were easily so arranged as to go on the horse that carried myself, and the other was consequently sent back. During the last week I had been permitted to walk every day in the court of the prison, and had, in consequence, regained, in a great degree, the use of my limbs; but still I was very much fatigued when I arrived at the end of our first day's journey. The officer who conducted or guarded me was a very quiet civil personage, and as we rode along, he told me that he was ordered to require my parole not to attempt an escape, and then to give me every sort of liberty.

My parole was, of course, willingly given, and after a slow and, as it appeared to me, a tedious march, we arrived in Paris just three days after the battle of the Faubourg St. Antoine. We had nearly, it is true, been cut off by a body of royalist cavalry, who passed us in the neighbourhood of Charonne; but it is probable that, never dreaming a party attached to the Prince de Condé would show itself on that side of the town so immediately after his defeat, they took us for some of their own partizans. At all events, they passed within a hundred yards of our little troop; and their commander even shouted a good-morrow to the officer at our head, which, on his part, was returned with great courtesy. Such was the method in which war was carried on in those days.

On our entrance into Paris we found the whole town in one universal gabble concerning the battle of St. Antoine. Distiches, sarcasms, and epigrams were flying in every direction; and the gay tone and witty repartee of each Parisian, from whom we even enquired our way, would but little have led a stranger to conclude that within three days an engagement had taken place at the very gates of the town, in which 4000 to 5000 men had been killed, and some of the noblest and bravest gentlemen of France had left their bodies on the field. Still less, indeed, did the gaiety and good humour which were observable amongst the people, indicate, in any degree, the fierce and sanguinary passions which were soon to be called into action; and we rode on through the streets, amidst a crowd of as merry faces as ever I remember to have seen.

Although we enquired repeatedly, no one could tell us anything certain concerning the Prince de Condé. Some said that he was even then in the town; some said he was with his army, encamped without the walls, just beyond the Faubourg St. Victor; some said that he had gone to effect his junction with the Spanish force; and the officer, whose orders were merely to join him, thought it best to proceed to the Hôtel de Ville, in order to gain further information. It is not impossible, indeed, that the vicinity of a famous sutling-house, known to every *bon vivant* in the army, at the corner of the *Rue de la Mortellerie*, might be an inducement to my conductor, and, at all events, certain it is that he directed his steps to the sutler's in the very first instance,

Here, however, he learned that the Prince was, at that very moment, in the Hôtel de Ville itself; and, after taking care to refresh his men and himself with the choicest stores of the sutler's larder, he left me at the house on the strength of my parole, and proceeded to seek the Prince for the purpose of obtaining further orders. As I remained in the high room in which he had dined, and had nothing else to occupy my attention, I amused myself by gazing out of the window upon the various groups that were now thronging into the open space before the Town-house. It was a hot, sultry day in July; and all the crowds of Parisians, who, like butterflies, come forth whenever the sun shines, were filling the streets, and all seemed to me pouring on in one direction. The masses in the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville became every moment more and more dense, so that it was difficult at length for those whose business called them to the Town-house, to make their way thither. A number of petty affrays took place, in consequence of the endeavours made by several individuals to force their passage through the crowd; and a spirit of riot began to manifest itself, which it was not difficult to divine would end in more serious disorders. I remarked about this time, that almost everyone I saw in the crowd had one or two wheat straws stuck into his hat or cap; the greater part also appeared armed, and I could not help anticipating very unpleasant results from the assemblage of such a number of the lower classes at a moment of general excitement and license. After a time, however, the people seemed to become more quiet; and, before long, I saw the Prince de Condé, with a number of other noblemen and gentlemen, come out of the Hôtel de Ville, and ride away amidst the acclamations of the populace.

I now expected the return of the officer every moment, but nevertheless he did not appear; and, still gazing forth upon the dark masses of the multitude, fluctuating hither and thither like the waves of a troubled sea, I soon after beheld a party of gentlemen, preceded by a royal trumpet, enter the Place de Grève, and endeavour to make their way through the people. At the head of this little body I at once recognised Monsieur de Villardin, riding beside a gentleman whom I did not know, but who, I found afterwards, was the Maréchal de l'Hôpital. With much difficulty they gained the steps of the Town-house, amidst the execrations and the insults of the people; and every moment, while waiting the return of a messenger whom they sent into the building, they were exposed both to danger and offence. At length when, as it appeared, the order for giving them admittance was returned, and they dismounted from their horses and entered the doors, a general rush of the people took place, apparently for the purpose of enveloping and massacring the king's officers, though they had come with a flag of truce. The doors, however, were closed promptly upon them; but the fury of the populace now passed all bounds: yells, more like the cries of demons than those of human beings, issued from the multitude; the signal for strife was given by the discharge of a musket; and while a number, who had possessed themselves of firelocks, kept up a scattered fire at the windows of the Hôtel de Ville, I saw a large body rush away towards the quay, from which they returned in a few minutes, bearing bundles of firewood which was there piled up for sale. Before any measures could be taken to prevent them, a mass of these faggots, between six and seven feet in height, was heaped up against the great door, some lighted embers were procured from a neighbouring house, and in a moment the whole was in a blaze.

It was now evident that the purpose of the multitude was to massacre all those that were within the Hôtel de Ville; and the cries of "Death to them all!" "Down with the Mazarines!" "Spare not the traitors!" "Take none to mercy!" which rose up in deafening shouts as the people continued firing in at the windows of the Town-house, and piling up fresh logs of wood upon the fire before the door, convinced me that, if something could not be done to save him, the life of Monsieur de Villardin would be lost within ten minutes. The guards, indeed, within the building, fired a few shots from time to time upon the people, but their number was too few to offer any serious resistance, and the efforts that they did make only served to irritate their assailants to a pitch of frenzy.

There was no time for consideration; the life of Monsieur de Villardin depended on the turning of a die; and running down the stairs as hard as I could, I caught up for a badge of partizanship some straws, which I found under a pile of cheeses in the kitchen, and rushing forward towards the door of the Hôtel de Ville, I determined to force my way into it amongst the very first, in order to take advantage of whatever opportunity might occur to save the life of my friend. As I pushed on, elbowing my way through the crowd, one of the rioters, who was armed with a musket, turned fiercely upon me for disturbing his aim; and he seemed about to strike me with the butt end of his piece, when a shot from the windows of the building settled our dispute by going through his head. He fell forward upon me, but, throwing him off, I snatched the musket out of his hands, as it could be of no further service to him, and might be of great service to me; and thus armed, I soon forced a passage for myself up to the very door of the building. My eagerness and haste, though inspired by very different motives from those which actuated the rest of the crowd, caught the attention and excited the applause of a number of persons in the multitude, and was afterwards of great service to me in effecting my object. Lucky it was that all these circumstances combined to facilitate my advance, for scarcely had I reached the doors, when they gave way, and fell thundering and blazing into the entrance hall. A number of those cooped up within rushed forth, and, plunging into the crowd, endeavoured to effect their escape; while I, darting through the midst of them, sprang up the stairs towards those spots where Monsieur de Villardin had been generally found upon former occasions.

He was not in the great hall, however, nor in the grand chamber, where the Parliament usually assembled, but I found him in one of the buvettes with Monsieur de l'Hôpital, and a young man whom I had remarked amongst the most vehement of the rioters without, but who had outstripped me by passing the shortest way, and was now engaged in rapid conversation with the Maréchal de l'Hôpital. The moment I rushed in, with my face covered with the smoke and dirt of the fire which had been kindled at the gate, and the musket in my hand, Monsieur de Villardin drew his sword, not recognising a friend in the figure before him; but as soon as I had entered, I closed the door between the buvettes and the passage leading to the great chamber, and turning the key, which I put in my pocket, I thus shut out those who, I knew, could not be far behind me. By this time the Duke had recognised me, and was exclaiming, "Good God, De Juvigny! I thought you dead, my dear lad! How came you here?"

"There is no time to tell you," I replied. "Instantly change part of your clothes with me, and throw away that scarf, or you will be murdered directly. If you wish to save that gentleman," I added, turning to the young man who was speaking with the Maréchal de l'Hôpital, "make him change his dress."

Monsieur de Villardin had at that moment a fillemot-coloured cloak, lined with light blue, and light blue plumes in his hat; but without pausing for any ceremonious consent, I tore the cloak from his shoulders, and threw over him my own, which, having been purchased by the gaoler at Stenay, and having passed through a long journey in July, was neither very fine nor very clean. The blue plumes were next scattered upon the floor; and as there was a procureur's gown hanging over one of the benches, I tore off the cord to fasten a few of the straws which I had assumed as the badge of the popular party into the front of Monsieur de Villardin's hat. The white scarf was then disposed of; and as we could hear the shouts of the multitude coming from the side of the grand chamber, we took our way as fast as possible to the small door which led from the buvettes into the outer hall. Here, however, we were met by a dense mass of the populace, who instantly assailed us with cries and hootings, and one fierce-looking savage drew back his pike to run it into my chest; but calling him boldly an accursed *Mazarine*, I pointed the firelock at his head, and would certainly have shot, had he made the slightest movement. But at that moment one of his companions recognised me as having shown great activity in the crowd below, and catching my adversary by the arm, assured him that it was I who had first proposed to burn the doors. This honourable reputation, though founded on a falsehood, gained me instant applause; and knowing that the best means to manage a mob is to employ it on any mischief, I told the rascals that some Mazarines in the grand chamber had barricaded the doors of the buvettes, and leading them back to the one I had myself locked, I set them to work to demolish it, well assured that they would meet a party of their friends on the other side.

In the meanwhile, Monsieur de Villardin had been pushing his way on towards the door; and I found him held at bay by half a dozen of the rioters, who would have cut his throat within another minute; but as I approached, I shouted with the full strength of my voice to bring sledge-hammers, and taking him by the arm, asked if he had found any. He replied, smiling in the midst of the imminent danger which surrounded him, that he could not even seek them, for that the gentry before me would not let him pass. Strong in my reputation as a leader of the tumult, I now set to work to curse them with my whole heart, asking if they were partisans of the Court and friends of Mazarine; and bidding them, if they were followers of the Fronde and the Princes, immediately to seek sledge-hammers, to knock down all the doors. This seemed so laudable an undertaking in their sight, that shouting, "Des marteaux! des marteaux! vîte! des marteaux!" they rushed away in search of hammers, while, seizing Monsieur de Villardin by the arm, I cried, "Come, come; I know a blacksmith's where we shall find plenty." And thus boldly taking upon ourselves the character of chief rioters, we made our way down the stairs and out into the *Place*. Our situation, however, was still more dangerous here than ever; for a number of the more coolly bloodthirsty had suffered the violent and the excited to make their way into the building, while they themselves remained without, in order to watch their victims as they came forth into the Place de Grève, and then massacre them without mercy. The cry for hammers, however, had already spread amongst them, and I found it a sort of watch-word, which, for a time, obtained a passage—though that passage was through the warm blood and amongst the quivering bodies of the unhappy men who had lately tenanted the Town-house.

Just as we were passing through the midst of the Place, one fierce and brutal wretch had got down the unhappy Ferrand de Vavari, one of the councillors, and was coolly running a knife into his throat, notwithstanding all his cries and struggles, with the same reckless indifference with which a butcher kills a sheep. Starting up as we passed, the assassin shouted out, "More Mazarines! More Mazarines! Why do you let them go?"

The people made a movement round us, and I saw that there was nothing for it but decision. Halting abruptly in the midst, I cried, with every appearance of fury and indignation that either my voice or features would take on, "He calls me a Mazarine!—me!—a Mazarine!—when he knows us both for officers of the Prince de Condé:—me a Mazarine!" and without further ceremony—seeing that the incarnate fiend, who, most probably, recognised Monsieur de Villardin, was about to retort upon me—I presented my musket, and, at the same moment, pulled the trigger. He fell directly; and the people, convinced by the boldness of the action that I was really a follower of the Princes, who were then omnipotent amongst them, made way, shouting, "Vivent les Princes! Vive Condé!"

Without giving time for those who had crowded round my fallen opponent to become interested in his cause, or to hear anything he might have to say in case he were only wounded, I hurried forward as fast as possible, directing my course away from the river, towards which Monsieur de Villardin seemed inclined to proceed. The fact was, however, that at the window of one of the houses in that part of the Grève, I saw the head of the Duc de Beaufort, backed by the faces of several of his officers; and as I did not feel at all sure that he might not point us out for massacre as we passed, I thought it best to get out of his sight by the nearest road.

When once we were fairly away from the Place and its immediate vicinity, where the fury of the people was blind and indiscriminate, the straw in our hats secured us a free passage, though the streets were everywhere thronged with rioters; but as Monsieur de Villardin might each moment be recognised by someone who had known him during his former residence in Paris, I made the best of my way to the house of an honest shoemaker, who had served the whole household of the Duke, and served them well. All the shops were by this time shut up, for fear of pillage; and long were we obliged to knock before the good man ventured to open his door and let us in: when he did so, however, he showed us every sort of kindness, and thanked heaven a thousand times for the escape of the Duke. Bringing us to a neat upper room, where we could lie concealed from anyone who might enter the lower part of the house, he pointed out to us the means of escaping over the roofs should it become necessary; but of this neither Monsieur de Villardin nor myself entertained the least apprehension; and while the good shoemaker went down to provide, as far as possible, for our comfort and security, we began to breathe more freely than we had done for some time, and to talk over the adventures of the last few hours.

"A second time I have to thank you for life," said Monsieur de Villardin, after a few exclamations concerning the sort of insanity that had seized upon the Parisians—"a second time I have to thank you for life.—Take care," he added, with a faint smile, "take care! for you are causing me to accumulate debts which I shall never have the means of paying. But, tell me, how came you here, and where have you been for the last three months? Several of your men declared they saw you killed in attempting to repulse the party who set fire to the château of Virmont. I need hardly tell you that I and Father Ferdinand have grieved for you, and Laura has wept for you ever since."

"Thank God for that, at least," I replied: "not for your grieving for me, my lord, but for the safety of Father Ferdinand and Mademoiselle de Villardin, in regard to both of whom I have been in a cruel state of anxiety ever since I last saw them." I then proceeded to detail, as briefly as possible, all the events that had occurred to me during the last three months; and I could see that Monsieur de Villardin, while rejoicing in my escape, was moved with no slight indignation both at the treatment I had received from Gaspard de Belleville, and at the fact of his former page having been the person to burn his house to the ground.

"The villain," he said, "did not even know that my household and my child were not still within the building; for their escape was owing solely to the civility of the officer at the village, who sent up to warn them that he was about to march, and that other parties were coming up, who might not be so well disposed towards them as himself. They took advantage of this information in time, and sought refuge in one of the cottages in the wood; otherwise they might all have been burnt indiscriminately; for the first act that the enemy's soldiers were seen to commit was that of throwing a number of grenades into the open windows, by which means the whole house was fired in a few minutes. If I live three days longer," he added, after detailing these particulars, "I will represent the whole of that young villain's conduct to the Prince de Condé: he must not go any longer unpunished, whatever may have been my reasons for not dealing severely with him hitherto."

I knew well that Monsieur de Villardin's indignation would be infinitely increased when he heard all his other obligations to Gaspard de Belleville; but, as I had no inclination to irritate him further at this time, and as the tidings that I bore from Suzette required to be communicated gently, I determined to reserve them for another moment. "I will request you, my Lord," I replied, "when you make your complaint against Gaspard de Belleville, to take the same opportunity of soliciting my liberation at the Prince de Condé; for, of course, as I only came out of the sulter's in order to rescue you, I must still consider myself a prisoner upon parole."

"Fear not, fear not, De Juvigny," he replied: "you shall soon be liberated, either as a favour to myself, or upon ransom; and you shall find, through my whole life, that I never forget, on any occasion, all the services with which you have contrived to load me in the short space of five or six years."

We had still enough subjects of conversation undiscussed to give us plenty of employment for the rest of the evening, especially as our thoughts were every now and then diverted to other subjects by reports brought to us by our worthy host of all that was going on in the city. From him we soon learned that the Maréchal de l'Hôpital, on whose account Monsieur de Villardin had felt a good deal of anxiety, was in a place of safety, having effected his escape from the Hôtel de Ville by means of the lad Noblet, whom we had seen speaking with him. About ten o'clock at night we also received the welcome tidings that the mob had dispersed, and that large parties of the Garde Bourgeoise were patroling the streets in every direction; so that we might consider the sedition at an end. We remained in our concealment, however, during the whole of that night; but, early the next morning, finding that tranquillity was perfectly restored, we ventured out, and after having seen Monsieur de Villardin on his road to the court, I turned my steps, as had been agreed upon between us, towards the camp of the Prince de Condé, in order to give myself up and redeem my parole.

On enquiring further, I found that the army of the Princes was really on the other side of the river; and crossing over by the Cité, I made my way on foot towards the open grounds of St. Victor, and the little river of Biévre, between which and the Seine I soon perceived the forces of the Prince de Condé intrenched in a position which might be considered perfectly impregnable, at least against any power that the court could bring against it. I gave myself up as a prisoner at the first outpost, but demanded to be conducted to the Prince himself, if he were then in the camp. The reply, however, was, that he was still in Paris, and I was consequently led to his Maître de Camp, who proved to be an officer to whom I was known, he having served with me during the siege of Bordeaux, and especially in defence of the demi-lune of the Porte Digeaux. From him I received every sort of kindness and attention, till the Prince himself returned to the camp, which did not take place for several hours. As soon as his arrival was known, I was conducted to his quarters, and was at once admitted to his presence. Two lacqueys were pulling off his boots and arranging his dress, while he was giving a number of orders to those around him, and at the same time signing two or three papers which different officers presented for his approval.

"Ha! Monsieur de Juvigny," he cried, as soon as his keen eye fell upon me, "I am glad to see you—I am glad to see you; but stay a minute till I have despatched all these affairs. I have a good deal to say to you, for Gourville has told me all about you."

The minute which the Prince desired me to stay, extended itself to nearly an hour and a half; for no sooner was one application attended to, than another was made from a different quarter; and as soon as one visitor left his presence, another entered.

"There! shut the door," he cried at length, as soon as he found that we were left alone even for a moment; "let anyone who comes wait without till I am ready for them." The servant to whom he spoke instantly proceeded to put his commands in execution, and turning to me, the Prince added, in the brief, frank, perhaps abrupt tone, which he usually employed, "Well, Monsieur de Juvigny, I have not seen you since you were playing the Garçon Apothicarie, in the castle of Vincennes; and although our scheme did not succeed, and you have now, it seems, turned against me, yet I am not the less grateful for the extreme risk which you then ran in endeavouring to serve me. I hear from everybody the highest character of you. I myself have been a witness of your courage and dexterity. Such a person is now most needful to me; and what I wished to say to you is, that if you will consent to attach yourself to me, you shall find me a firm friend and an unfailing protector. I will advance you in the service, and whatever post about my person you will name shall be yours, unless it be already filled by some old and tried friend."

The offer was not only a very tempting one, but it was difficult to refuse it without the chance of giving offence—at least those who did not know the Prince de Condé would have thought so. As it was perfectly impossible for me to comply, however, feeling, as I did, that he was absolutely in a state of rebellion against his king, and that I was even then bearing a commission in that monarch's service, I answered him boldly and straightforwardly, which I had always found to be the best way with men of his keen and rapid disposition.

"Nothing I should consider a higher honour, nothing I should feel to be a greater pleasure than that of serving your Highness," I replied, "if your Highness's service were compatible with that of the King; but you must remember, my lord, that I have bound myself by oath to the cause of his Majesty."

"Pshaw!" cried the Prince de Condé. "In these times no one minds such oaths as that. Why, there is not an officer in my service that does not come and go between my camp and the king's a dozen times in the year; and, in truth, I do not always very well know, when I meet a friend in the field, whether he is my own partizan for the time or not."

"All I can reply to your Highness," I answered, "is, that had I joined your forces I should, of course, have remained with them till war were over; and, such being my feelings, I am afraid that if I can obtain my freedom either by ransom or exchange, or the kindness of your Highness, I must still go back to the camp of the King, and undergo all the defeats which I doubt not you intend to inflict upon us."

"Think of it better—think of it better," replied the Prince: "your liberty you certainly shall have; and you shall choose whether you will, take it at my hands, as a fulll acquitta of all I owe you, for endeavouring to deliver me from Vincennes, or whether—holding still your claim upon me for that service, to be discharged by something more important hereafter—you will pay a light ransom to Master Gaspard de Belleville, who, to say the truth, is somewhat grasping and avaricious for so young a man."

Of course I could not hesitate in regard to which I should choose, and, therefore, I replied at once, "I will endeavour to pay whatever ransom your Highness may think proper to name, and will give an order for it instantly to Monsieur de Belleville, though he has no just right to consider me as his prisoner."

"Nay, nay, not so fast, not so fast!" cried the Prince; "you must take some little time to think of my proposal. De Belleville is not in the camp just now, but he will be here to-morrow or the next day. In the meanwhile seek out Gourville, whom you will find either with the army, or at the Hôtel de Rochefoucault in Paris. Bid him make much of you, and treat you well on my account, trying all he can to persuade you to remain with us. Nay, do not shake your head, but go and think over it better."

As his last words implied an order to quit him, I immediately took my leave and withdrew, somewhat mortified at not being able to obtain my freedom as soon as I had expected, but fully determined not to flinch from my duty in the slightest degree, however long I might consequently be detained a prisoner.

Almost immediately after quitting the Prince de Condé, my good fortune threw me in the way of Gourville, to whom I related all that had just passed. As far as treating me well, he certainly did follow the injunctions of his Highness, but in regard to persuading me that it would be better to join the party of the Princes, he most assuredly did not do as Condé had directed him. He shook his head at the very thought, saying, "No, no; let those who are attached to the party remain attached to it, for if no divisions existed amongst ourselves, we should do very well, and compel the court to take what measures we liked; but it would never do for you, who neither know all the intrigues that are going on, nor the men that are conducting them; and besides, the party of the court is at all events the most secure; for, however long the struggle may be protracted, it will be the successful side in the end, depend upon it."

By the assistance and attention of Gourville, everything that I could want was supplied to me; and, by means of some of the bankers in Paris, I obtained money upon an assignment of my rents in Normandy and Brittany. My first care was to repay Gourville the sum I had received from him at Stenay, which, of course, he did not affect to decline. My next step was to ascertain from him the amount which my liberation was likely to cost me. To my enquiries on this head, he replied, that he could hardly tell, but, that when he was in prison at Sedan, it had cost his friends six thousand livres to obtain his enlargement. This prospect rather frightened me, as such a sum would nearly exhaust my whole income for the year, but, of course, I was obliged to make up my mind to it, and there the matter dropped.

The day following I caught a distant glance of Gaspard de Belleville riding through the streets of Paris, and I consequently begged Gourville to represent to the Prince my extreme desire to be set at liberty. But either he thought it worth while to keep me for a day or two longer, in order to make me join his party, or he was too deeply engaged in more important affairs to attend to my request. At all events I could obtain no answer, and remained that day and the next, without hearing anything more upon the subject.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TIRED of delay, I, at length, resolved to apply once more to the Prince in person, though Gourville shook his head, laughing, and told me that he could see very plainly that his Highness was determined to keep me some time longer. About noon, I went out to the camp, but, on arriving at the door of the house in which the Prince de Condé had taken up his quarters, and which was the tapestry manufactory, called les Gobelins, then belonging to a private individual, I was agreeably surprised to find half-a-dozen of the grooms and attendants of Monsieur de Villardin. From them I learned that the Duke had obtained a safe-conduct the preceding day, and had arrived on a visit to the Prince about an hour before. In the ante-chamber I found the officer who had brought me to Paris, and who, informing me that messengers had already been sent to seek me, directed one of the attendants to let the Prince know that I had arrived. The next moment I was admitted to his Highness's presence, and found him seated with Monsieur de Villardin, while Gaspard de Belleville stood before them with a sullen and downcast countenance, on which I plainly read the workings of reproof and correction upon a stubborn and an evil heart.

The sound of my step instantly called upon me a glance from my adversary as quick as lightning, and full of rage and hatred. Condé, however, took no notice of my approach, and continued the interrogation of his officer which had previously commenced.

"Pray, sir," he said, "how came you to fire the château at all when the general order was given to keep silence, and conduct the advance with as much secresy as possible?"

"I caused the house to be burned, your Highness, by order of the Duke of Nemours," replied Gaspard.

"But the Duke tells me," rejoined the Prince, "that the order was given at your suggestion. How was that, sir? speak!"

"My reason for proposing it, my lord," replied the officer, "was, that I thought the regiment of Latour might miss its way without some signal from us; and by that time the Englishman there had discovered our march and lighted a beacon on the hill."

"For which your Highness owes him no great thanks," said Monsieur de Villardin with a smile; "for the tidings we received from him enabled us to keep you in check the next day."

"He did his duty, and he did it well, my good friend," answered the Prince; "I would to God that my officers would do the same. "As for you, sir," he continued, addressing Gaspard de Belleville, "it is quite sufficiently evident that your motives were not the best in burning the château of Virmont, and still more evident, that your conduct towards your prisoner afterwards was unworthy and ungenerous. In regard to the first, you have certainly taken care to shelter yourself under an order from the Duke of Nemours; but, as you suggested that order, I shall dismiss you from every post about my person, though you keep your company. In regard to the treatment of your prisoner, of which Monsieur de Villardin has explained to me the cause, I can, of course, only reprove you for conduct unbecoming a French gentleman. There is no military law which enables me to punish such behaviour, except, indeed, by reducing the ransom which may be demanded for him, and which I fix at 400 crowns."

Of course Gaspard de Belleville dared not reply to the severe terms of the Prince; but I saw his eye glare from my face to that of Monsieur de Villardin with an expression which would have boded neither of us any good had his means of injuring us been equal to his desire of doing so. Monsieur de Villardin declared that he would pay my ransom himself, and immediately gave an order for the sum, which Condé delivered into the hands of my adversary, and bade him retire.

"I am obliged," said the Prince, in a sort of apologetic tone, as soon as we were left without other witnesses—"I am obliged to suffer these fellows to make as much of their trade as they can, or a great number of them would leave me. In other respects, the system of taking ransoms, which, thank God, is becoming less common, is by no means one I like. But, however, I have suffered you to escape at a cheap rate, Monsieur de Juvigny," he added, turning towards me, "and as I find you are determined not to stay with me, I suppose I must even let you go."

As these words might be considered as a hint that our audience was at an end, Monsieur de Villardin rose, and we took our leave, the Prince laying his hand familiarly upon my arm as we were departing, and saying in a kind tone, "I shall not forget Vincennes."

Without suffering me to return to Paris, Monsieur de Villardin made one of his servants give me up a horse, and we rode together at once to St. Denis, where the court was then assembled. I now found that some interest had been excited concerning my fate amongst persons whom I had scarcely imagined to be acquainted with my existence. To Monsieur de Turenne, to the Queen, to the young King, and to the Cardinal, I was presented once more by Monsieur de Villardin, on the occasion of my liberation, and I found that each had something to say to me upon my late adventures. Turenne told me, in his simple manner, that he was very much obliged to me for thinking of the beacons, as the speedy information communicated to him of the march of the Prince de Condé had most likely saved the royal army at Briare. The Queen said she remembered me at Poitiers, and added that a long imprisonment must be a more beneficial thing than was generally supposed, as my appearance was very much improved.

The Cardinal said something, with a strong Italian accent; I saw that it was intended to be witty and pointed, and though I did not very well understand it, I smiled, which did quite as well. The young King thanked me gracefully for my services and attachment to his cause, and added, "I trust that means will occur ere long of rewarding your exertions and compensating your sufferings in our cause."

All this promised well for my future success in life; and though at that time my ambition was cooped within very narrow limits, I must own that I felt a good deal of joy at the prospect of rising to some station where I might distinguish myself in the profession of arms.

The pleasure, however, of being free, and of meeting applause where I most desired it, was, indeed, a little alloyed by the necessity of communicating to Monsieur de Villardin the confession—for such, in fact, it was—of Suzette. I knew not what effect it might ultimately have upon his mind, whether good or bad—whether the knowledge of having injured an innocent and virtuous woman who had loved him dearly, and was passionately loved by him, might not send the sting of remorse still deeper into his heart—especially if the fearful suspicions which I entertained were just; or whether, on the other hand, the discovery that he had been worked upon and deceived by designing people and an artful scheme, that he had been cheated into all the acts he had committed, and almost driven mad himself by a plot which he could hardly have divined, might not take away some portion of the responsibility which now weighed so heavy upon him, and cast a part of the load of culpability upon other shoulders. At all events I knew that the very renewal of a subject which had never been mentioned for several years, would re-awaken a world of painful memories, some of which I trusted now slept; and I shrunk from the task I had undertaken, hoping from day to day that something would occur to render its execution less difficult. Monsieur de Villardin, however, seemed also to avoid the topic altogether; and although he knew that I had seen Suzette several times, and must in his own mind have connected her name with the memory of his unhappy wife, yet he never mentioned the circumstance after our arrival at St. Denis, and seemed purposely to turn from any reference to Gaspard de Belleville and his wife. The matter was thus rendered more difficult to me; and, as I could not but remark that the gloom which I have before noticed, had taken a deeper hold of Monsieur de Villardin than ever—as, the moment that any active exertion was over, all energy seemed to abandon his mind,—and as it pained me to think of increasing the deep and bitter melancholy in which he passed all his solitary hours, I still, as I have said, put off the task from day to day, till at length the army was ordered to march, and I had scarcely time to attend to anything else than the military duties in which I was now employed.

On my return to the regiment, I found that the troop which I commanded before my imprisonment had been nearly annihilated by the cross fire into which I had so rashly led them at Virmont. Not above twenty men, indeed, had escaped of those of whom it was originally composed. Monsieur de Villardin, however, had recruited it by the addition of about forty more; and, while we stayed at St. Denis, I did all that I could to gain volunteers. Thus, when we marched for Compiegne, the troop amounted to about eighty men; but, I must confess, that it was altogether in a much better state than when I had left it, for the number of marches, skirmishes, and manœuvres, which it had since taken part in under the command of Turenne, had done far more to render the men expert, veteran, and well disciplined, than all the drilling we could give them before.

It was very necessary, indeed, that our troops should be of the best quality, for, at this time, with less than ten thousand men, we had to make head against the Spanish army and the Duke of Lorraine on the frontiers of Flanders, while the forces of the Princes were in our rear—not sufficiently powerful, indeed, to meet us in the open field, but quite sufficiently so to render any check that we might receive from the superior numbers of the Spaniards utterly fatal to the royal cause.

It is unnecessary to relate the events that immediately succeeded, for there are few people in the present day who are not well acquainted with the skilful manœuvres by which Turenne, without striking a stroke, compelled the Spanish army to evacuate the French territory; and it would be only wearisome in this place to detail the means which he employed to arrive at such a fortunate result. This having been effected, however, we returned to Gonesse, in order to watch the movements of the Prince de Condé, who remained in the neighbourhood of Paris for the purpose of keeping his party in the capital from the ruin with which it was continually threatened by the dissensions of the leaders.

We were soon again in activity; for the Duke of Lorraine, having once more entered France with a force of sixteen thousand men, marched forward, on the side of Champagne, to effect his junction with the Prince de Condé. At the same time, that Prince decamped from under the walls of Paris to meet him, while Turenne hastened to pass the Marne at Lagni, and advanced with extraordinary rapidity upon Brie Comte Robert, where we first encountered the troops of the Duke of Lorraine. Finding that we were not strong enough to contest that post with him, we turned, and hastened towards Villeneuve St. George, but here again the troops of Lorraine were before us, the town in their possession, and the bridge, as well as the heights which command it, already occupied by two companies of infantry and four pieces of artillery. For the purpose of proceeding with greater speed, our own infantry and artillery had both been left to follow; and when he first discovered that this post also was in possession of the enemy, Turenne had only with him three regiments of cavalry. We had all halted, while the Maréchal rode forward to ascertain the facts with his own eyes, but, in a minute or two after, he cantered back to the head of Monsieur de Villardin's regiment, and spoke a few words to him in a kindly and smiling manner; and, as I was not far off, I heard him say, in reply to something which the Duke had observed, "Oh, no, my friend, one troop can dislodge them; and then, with our fresh forces, we can keep possession of the ground till the artillery comes up."

What Monsieur de Villardin replied I did not hear; but Turenne immediately answered, "We will give him the opportunity, at all events;" and I instantly received an order to draw out from the little wood that covered us, and charge the company that occupied the heights. An injunction was added not to follow the enemy too far, but to satisfy myself with dislodging them from their present post.

I found no difficulty in executing these commands. The enemy reserved their fire till we were within about fifty yards, and then received us with a general discharge. Half-a-dozen men and horses went over at once; but we were by this time in the very heat of the charge, and not one man who was capable of going forward tightened his rein. The enemy, who had expected to see us waiver, took fright at our approach, and, after a very faint resistance, were driven down the hill with considerable slaughter. Their guns and ammunition were left behind; and when, after some difficulty, I could halt my men and bring them back to the heights, I found the ground already occupied by Monsieur de Turenne, and the cannon which we had taken turned against the bridge.

The Duke of Lorraine, however, not being aware that our infantry and artillery had been left behind, imagined that Turenne occupied the heights in force, and, knowing the town to be untenable under such circumstances, instantly decamped, and took post upon the Seine, about a league farther up. No more skirmishing therefore occurred; and, without being obliged to fire upon either the bridge or the town, we remained in tranquil possession of our position till the rest of the forces came up, and rendered it completely secure.

Monsieur de Turenne made no observation at the moment upon the manner in which I had executed his commands, nor did I expect him to do so, for I knew that I had not performed my duty ill, but yet felt quite conscious that I had done no more than my duty. Towards six o'clock in the evening, however, I was called to his tent, and found him just concluding a despatch, giving notice to the court of the different manœuvres that had taken place. As soon as I entered he looked up, with one of his calm, intelligent smiles, saying merely, "You performed so well what I commanded you this morning that I am going to send you away from me. You must carry this despatch to Pontoise, or to whatever other town his Majesty may now be in; and I doubt not that he will appreciate the services of an officer who does gallantly and skilfully that which he is commanded without overstepping the line that is prescribed to him." A number of superior officers were present at the moment; and it may be well conceived that such words from such a man made my cheek glow with unexpected pleasure.

Monsieur de Villardin, who was also in the tent, followed me out, and told me that, while my horses were preparing, he would write a brief note to his cousin, Monsieur de le Tellier, one of the King's ministers, who might teach me how to turn to some account the favourable terms in which Monsieur de Turenne had mentioned me in his despatch. As speed is in all these cases a great object, and the first bearer of good tidings is always likely to be better received than those who follow after, I neither spared myself nor my horses till I reached Pontoise, which I accomplished, without the slightest interruption, in the course of the following day.

Great was the joy which my arrival spread; for neither king, nor queen, nor ministers, had felt themselves at all easy under the prospect of a junction between the Prince de Condé and the Duke of Lorraine in the immediate vicinity of Paris; and, as Turenne now gave them the most positive assurance that he would be able to keep both these generals in check for at least a month, while the court negotiated with the Parisians and raised new troops, it may be conceived that his despatch proved a very agreeable relief to the minds of all. It luckily so happened, also, that one of the persons the most interested in the tidings which I brought was precisely in the situation which best enabled him to make my journey as satisfactory to myself as it had proved to him. Cardinal Mazarin, having by this time been forced once more to quit France, had left his whole interest in the hands of his friend, Monsieur le Tellier; and that minister, who knew that the first reverse on the part of the court would induce the parliament to pronounce the Cardinal's banishment eternal, was perhaps more overjoyed than anyone at the tidings that I brought. I found him out immediately after my arrival, and communicated the intelligence to him before he had received it from any other person. At the very first intelligence he took me in his arms and hugged me, as if I had been his own son; and then, making me sit down to dinner with him, at which meal he had been engaged when I entered, he asked me a multitude of questions, seeking evidently a confirmation of the hopes which Monsieur de Turenne had held out.

I anticipated no immediate reward, however; and as I was very anxious to see the rest of the campaign I determined to depart the next day or the one following, if I could obtain leave to do so; and, therefore, on the morning after my arrival, I again visited the minister, in order to request that he would solicit for me the King's permission to that effect. Without making me any reply he took me by the hand and led me, followed by a secretary with his portfolio, to the presence of the young monarch and his mother, who were listening to some news from Paris, not quite so agreeable in its nature as my tidings had proved.

"This young gentleman, sire," said Monsieur le Tellier, "is all eagerness to return to the camp, in order to serve your Majesty in the field, but I think you said that you had some commands for him ere his departure?"

"You are right," replied the monarch; "are the letters drawn up?"

Le Tellier instantly took a parchment from the portfolio which was carried by his secretary, and placed it in the hands of the young king, who ran his eye hastily over it. Louis then addressed me, in a tone and manner so dignified and kinglike, that I could not but perceive that a great change had wrought itself in his mind since I was first presented to him at Saumur; though I little anticipated at the time that the alteration which I marked would go on progressively but rapidly, till the careless and somewhat indolent boy became the greatest monarch of his age.

"Monsieur de Juvingy," he said, "we are informed by the Maréchal de Turenne, that, when he held our court at Gien, by the prompt and skilful measures which your own judgment suggested, for conveying immediate information to our generals of the advance of the Prince de Condé, you saved us all from very imminent danger. He also informs us, in his despatch received yesterday, that you have again highly distinguished yourself in dislodging a superior body of the enemy from the heights above Villeneuve St. George, and he recommends you strongly to our notice and favour. We ourselves have not forgotten that you have once been severely wounded, and have suffered a long and cruel imprisonment for your attachment to our cause, and your opposition to the rebels now in arms against us. Monsieur le Tellier, also, upon the authority of Monsieur de Villardin, informs us that in your native country your father and mother were both of gentle blood; but, at all events, it is the prerogative of royalty to ennoble, and therefore it is, that we have caused these letters to be drawn up, not only for the purpose of expressing our thanks to you for the services you have performed, but also as a proof to all others that no one ever will serve us without meeting due honour and recompense."

He then gave me the parchment that he had received from Le Tellier; and, though I knew not what it contained, I bent my knee and kissed his Majesty's hand, with every token of gratitude. I then withdrew, in company with the minister, who, as soon as we were in another apartment, bade me open the letters and read the contents. I did so immediately, and found that the parchment contained letters patent, conferring on me the rank and title of Baron de Juvigny; and adding what seemed to me the more solid recompense of a pension of three thousand crowns per annum, chargeable upon the receipts of the duchy of Brittany, "till such time —," so the letters ran, "till such time as his Majesty thought fit to assign me an estate of equal value."

Monsieur le Tellier laid his left hand upon my shoulder as I read, and, pointing with his right to the words concerning the pension, he repeated, "Three thousand crowns!—that is, when you can get them, my young friend;" and laughing gaily, he added, "which will not be till the country is quiet, and these rebels put down. So go, and do your best against them; and God send that we may soon be delivered from their company altogether!"

"Amen!" replied I; and I doubt not that Monsieur le Tellier devoutly believed that it was the prospect of my three thousand crowns which gave such fervency to my aspirations; but it was perhaps that I was heartily tired of civil wars, having seen little else ever since I was born; and I certainly did long to be in one good stricken field, between nations of different tongues and dwelling-places, if it were but for a change. I said nothing, however, to undeceive the minister; but taking my leave, with many thanks for honours and rewards, which I felt very sure had been obtained for me fully as much by interest as by merit, I withdrew with the letters patent of a barony in my pocket, but very little else besides.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It was with great difficulty that I made my way back to the army, for by this time Condé had effected his junction with the Duke of Lorraine, and Turenne had encamped between Limei and the Yeres river, resting on the Seine on one side and on a thick wood on the other. The enemy's force amounting to three times his own, straightened the marshal's camp in every direction; and, shut in the angle formed by the confluence of the Seine and the Yeres, there seemed no possibility of escape for Turenne and his army. I know not to the present day if this position was or was not taken up through an oversight on the part of Turenne: and I am rather inclined to think it was, as at the time there were not provisions in the camp for four days, and the horses were almost entirely without forage; but if it was a fault, it was one of those glorious ones which sometimes to a man of genius prove more advantageous than the best laid plan. The result is well known. Turenne planted himself there between the enemy and Paris, threw bridges across the Seine, opened a communication with the neighbouring country, obtained provisions and forage notwithstanding all the efforts of his adversaries to prevent him, and kept a force of treble the number of his own army at bay during six weeks.

It was about the fourth day after the camp was formed that I returned from the court; but as the whole open country was at that time in the hands of the enemy, I had very nearly been taken by a strong party on the return from foraging. Strange to say, also, I had well nigh again fallen into the hands of Gaspard de Belleville, who commanded the escort, having been at one time within two hundred yards of him. Nothing but my horse's speed saved me; for being close pursued by some Cravates attached to the foragers, I was obliged to swim the river, which however was done with ease, and I found myself in security on the other bank.

Monsieur de Villardin welcomed me with every sign of joy, and immediately asked what Monsieur de le Tellier had done for me. He smiled when I told him, saying that he had hoped the court would have shown me some more substantial mark of favour.

"However," he added, "the King, no doubt, gave you the barony, which costs nothing but parchment and wax, because he had nothing else to give. As to the pension of three thousand crowns, as I know there has not been such a sum in the royal treasury for many months, you must not calculate upon that."

On examining our camp, I found that Monsieur de Villardin, who kept the open field, though some of the officers had been fortunate enough to obtain quarters in the little hamlets, had caused his tent to be divided into four small apartments, of which he assigned me one; and as our time passed very dully without any event of importance to occupy our attention, I had no excuse even to myself for delaying longer the communication which I had promised Suzette to make. The Duke behaved to me not only as a father, but as a kind and affectionate one; and whenever we were not engaged in some military duty, we were either sitting together in the division of the tent which he called his saloon, or walking along the banks of the rivers, mingling various subjects of conversation with observations upon the enemy's movements, of which we caught a sight from time to time. I thus had plenty of opportunities for telling my tale, had I been able to make up my mind to do so; but the more my affection for Monsieur de Villardin increased, the more proofs of tenderness and regard he gave me, the less willing I became to wring his heart by all the long details of so painful a theme.

Thus again I let day after day slip by, till one morning, as we were walking slowly along towards Château Ablon, which Turenne had taken some time before by a *coup de main*, the Duke afforded me himself an opportunity of introducing the subject, which I felt must not be longer neglected, if I ever intended to perform my task.

"Do you know, De Juvigny," he said, addressing me by the name which he always now gave me, "I have taken a sort of thirst lately to see my little Laura. She will be a great deal changed by this time since I last saw her. Did you not think," he added, in a sort of undertone, "did you not think that she was very like her mother?"

"I think she was, my Lord," I replied; "and God grant that she may have both her mother's virtues and her mother's beauty!"

"Without her sorrows," said Monsieur de Villardin in the same low tone, raising his eyes towards the sky, and adding, what from the moving of his lips I thought a prayer. "Without her sorrows," he again repeated louder, "and, oh! without any of her father's faults."

"Forgive me, my Lord," I said, feeling that now was the moment if ever, "forgive me if I do a bold thing, and attempt to offer you consolation upon your private sorrows."

He shook his head with a bitter and melancholy smile, replying, "Consolation, my dear boy, is in vain. I have sought it in every source—religion, philosophy, time, activity, danger; and I have never found it. It is the alchemist's elixir of life, a specious name, which can only be believed by those who have never tried it."

"Nevertheless, my Lord," I persevered in saying, "I think you may find consolation in some facts which I have to tell you; especially if, as your words just now implied, a part of your grief proceeds from the memory of some faults which you imagine to have existed in your conduct towards your deceased lady."

"All! all!" said the Duke, "all proceeds from those fatal memories; and I am afraid, De Juvigny, that you can in no degree assuage the burning of a heart, whose thoughts you cannot see."

"Still I must entreat you to listen to me," I rejoined; "for a man can scarcely be considered guilty for having committed actions which he was urged on to perform by the basest conspiracy to deceive him and to mislead his better judgment; and when such evidence was adduced to make him think the innocent guilty, as might well create suspicion against an angel of heaven."

My words at once showed him that I had something more to communicate than mere ordinary topics of ineffectual consolation, which fall upon the dull ear, but never reach the heart; and he soon became more eager to hear than I was to tell. Turning round quickly, he paused, and gazed at me as if he would have searched my very soul, to gather at once what I was about to relate; and then exclaimed, "Speak! speak! speak, young man!" in a tone and with a manner that almost made me fear the effect which Suzette's confession might have upon his reason.

I pointed, however, to the sentinels close by, who were gazing with some sort of wonder at his vehemence; and recovering command over himself, he walked on with me, with his eyes bent upon the ground, while I proceeded in a low and calm voice, in order that the tidings I had to give might be fully understood, without irritating his imagination by all the adjuncts of emphasis and gesture.

"You remember, my Lord," I said, "that I told you, when we were together in Paris, on the day of the massacre at the Hôtel de Ville, that I had been saved and well treated by Suzette, who is now the wife of Gaspard de Belleville. I told you, too, that he behaves to her in the most brutal manner; but I have not found an opportunity of telling you, till this moment, that she related to me the whole scheme by which she and her base husband contrived to deceive you and render you miserable. From a feeling, partly of remorse, partly, I believe, of hatred to her present tyrant, and partly in consequence of a vow which she made to her confessor, she charged me to detail the whole to you, word for word, and she gave me this billet, in order to make you yield full credit to the whole I have to tell. I have preserved that billet through everything," I added, putting it into his hands, "though I do not think you would have doubted my word even had I not possessed it."

Monsieur de Villardin took it eagerly out of my hand, and read it over with a straining eye; but instantly turning to me, he exclaimed, "It tells me nothing—speak on! speak on! I would believe you of course without that—speak on!"

He had become deadly pale, however; and I paused, apprehensive of more painful consequences if I proceeded, saying, "Had I not better wait, my Lord, till you are more calm? The subject is too painful to you. Had I not better wait?"

"Perhaps you had," replied Monsieur de Villardin, who felt how much he was shaken, "perhaps you had. I shall soon recover from this, my dear boy; and when I can lend my rational senses to the consideration of what you have to tell me, instead of my passions, which are now engaged, I will tell you—perhaps to-night. Now give me your arm:" and with a slow step he turned back to his tent, where, shutting himself up in the inner division, he remained for some time alone.

At night, however, after returning from some other occupation, I found him much more calm; for the constant struggles he had long been obliged to maintain against his own feelings had given him the power of quelling their most turbulent efforts after a short space given to reflection.

"Now, De Juvigny," he said, almost as I entered the tent, "now I am capable of listening to your tidings, whatever they may be; so speak on—I can hear you like a rational being now."

As I saw that he was really prepared, I proceeded more boldly, and related to him, word for word, as far as my memory served me, the account which had been given to me by

Suzette. This I was permitted to do uninterrupted, for, with his head leaning upon his arm, and his hand shading his eyes, he listened, without question or comment of any kind whatsoever, till I had finished all that I had to say. Even for some minutes afterwards he remained still buried in deep thought, though the words, "Fiends!—incarnate fiends!" which once or twice broke from his lips, showed that his mind was busy with the tale of deceit and villany which I had just related.

"You have, indeed," he said at length, "given me consolation; or, perhaps, as I had better call it, you have afforded to me the means of palliating, to my own mind, the errors that I have committed. I had but one palliation before—the consciousness," and he lowered his voice as he spoke, "the consciousness of having acted under mental aberration. It was consolatory to me to know that I had been a madman; and now," he continued, with a bitter smile, "it is still more consolatory to me to know that I was a fool—a gross and egregious fool! What must be the state of a man's heart when such convictions can be such a relief!"

"I think, my Lord," I replied, willing to do all that I could to soften the sting, "I think that anyone might have been deceived by such a base and deep-laid scheme as that by which you were betrayed."

"Nay, nay," he added, "I was a fool, a consummate fool, in everything, and in none less than in thinking that my feelings, and my designs, and my weaknesses, were all hidden within my own bosom, when they seem to have been as plain to yourself and to those two false and cruel wretches as they were to the eyes of Heaven. Do not strive to persuade me that I was not blind and foolish. It is, I tell you, it is a consolation to me to know that I was so. Deep, eternal, everlasting regret will still continue my portion throughout life. Every unkind word, every harsh look, every ungenerous and cruel action, with which I afflicted the heart of her who is now a saint in heaven, will rise up night after night, and day after day, before my memory, and render the sky that overhangs me and the world around dark and gloomy for ever. Each action, each look, each word, each smile of her who is now no more, will be remembered with sad and inconsolable regret; but nevertheless, that I was myself deceived—that my own wild and mad suspicions were not all—that I was fooled and played upon, and made to act a part my better nature disavows—this, this, I acknowledge, presses part of the poison out of the wound, and softens the sting of remorse. I thank you for your tidings, De Juvigny," he added, laying his hand kindly upon mine arm, "I thank you from my very heart. Your voice always brings me comfort, and your arm always renders me service."

He paused for a moment or two again, and then asked me one or two questions concerning Suzette, to which I replied as clearly, but as briefly as I could, for I thought it better to change the painful subject for some other as fast as possible, and, having administered the medicine, to let time work out its effect in silence. He seemed, however, to take a pleasure himself in dwelling upon the theme, now that it had once been spoken of between us. "Her whole story," he added, alluding to Suzette, "is so minutely consistent with every circumstance which I remember, that I cannot doubt it in the least. To confess one weakness more, I acknowledge that it is no small comfort to my mind to find every circumstance that deceived me, susceptible of a clear and satisfactory explanation; to see every cloud of doubt wafted away from the remembrance of one who now will live for ever enshrined in my heart, not the less loved, not the less adored, that bitter sorrow for her fate, and deep contrition for my faults, embalm her memory, and wash her tomb with tears."

I was delighted to find that what I told produced such an effect; for, to say the truth, I had been like an unskilful physician, and knew not at the time that I administered it, whether the cup which I had presented to Monsieur de Villardin would prove a poison or an antidote. It had evidently become the latter, and I doubted not that every hour which passed would increase its power. I saw too, that, in some degree, Suzette had shrewdly divined the true state of Monsieur de Villardin's feelings; and that, however much he might be convinced before that he had deeply wronged his wife, his mind would never have rested satisfied till all the mysterious circumstances, which at first aroused his suspicions, had been explained as clearly as they were at present. From the first effect of the tidings I had given, I was led to expect more beneficial results than they afterwards produced. Monsieur de Villardin certainly was calmer from that day forward, the sting of remorse was, as he had said, softened; a part of the load was off his head, but still the deep and bitter melancholy continued. I could see a slight difference—a shade less in the darkness of the gloom that oppressed him, but that was all. He was not so often found sitting alone immersed in sad and frowning thought. I saw him more frequently with a book in his hand; and events of less importance than heretofore would rouse him into activity and exertion. Yet he was never what can be called cheerful; despondency remained the general character of his mind, and he still seemed to find that relief in moments of danger and excitement, which showed that calm thought was little less painful than heretofore.

Three weeks of almost perfect inactivity, however, succeeded, and with the exception of an occasional unimportant skirmish with the enemy, we passed our time in idleness in the camp. In the meanwhile, events were in preparation which were destined to change the aspect of political affairs. A schism had taken place between the Prince de Condé and the leaders of the Fronde; the Duke of Nemours had been killed by his brother-in-law, the Duke of Beaufort, in a duel; the Parisians were gradually becoming heartily sick of turbulence and faction, which they found only served—as turbulence and faction always do—to promote the views of a few intriguing individuals at the sacrifice of commerce, industry, and the public good; and the court, negotiating with all parties, had by this time obtained such a preponderance, that it seemed likely to be received with open arms in Paris, if the army of Turenne could, by any means, be extricated from its present position, and brought nearer to the capital.

At length an express order arrived for Turenne to endeavour, on the very first favourable opportunity, to decamp and join the court; and that great general—knowing that his movements were no longer watched by the keen eye of Condé, who had gone back in person to Paris, in the belief that the royal army could not escape—determined to attempt his retreat at once. On the morning of the 4th October, orders were sent to the officer who commanded in the town of Corbeil, to raise some redoubts on the heights near that place, and bridges having been thrown across the river, we waited till night, and then began our march in silence. We hastened on as fast as possible till we got between the Seine and the forest of Senard, when, both our flanks being covered, we could advance in security. From this point we proceeded more slowly, still looking out, however, for our enemy, who never appeared; and to tell the truth, we might have marched in any direction we liked, for we had arrived at Corbeil, and were safe in our new position, long before the Duke of Lorraine even perceived that we had quitted our former camp. A longer and more difficult march, however, was before us, for we had now to join the court at Mantes, and to cross a great extent of country in presence of an infinitely superior force. Whether the Duke of Lorraine was deceived in regard to our movements, or whether he did not choose to act in the absence of the Prince de Condé, I cannot tell; but certain it is that we were suffered to proceed without interruption, and arrived in the neighbourhood of Senlis without having to fire a shot.

The presence of the army and the safety of its troops were not the greatest advantages which the court derived from this extraordinary retreat. The mismanagement of the Duke of Lorraine, and the absence of the Prince de Condé from his army, at a moment when his presence was so much required, ruined entirely the already sinking reputation of the faction opposed to the court. The Parisians, who had long begun to hate it, now added contempt to detestation; and we heard at Mantes, that Condé himself had been actually hooted in the streets of the capital, before he quitted it to rejoin his troops. Tremendous autumnal rains had now succeeded; both provisions and forage had by this time been exhausted in the neighbourhood of the Prince's camp; and after one of the most inglorious campaigns that he ever made, Condé found himself obliged to retreat upon Laon, passing within a few miles of our forces at Senlis.

All was now joy and satisfaction for the moment; but, as neither officers nor men had received any pay for a considerable time, it became probable that, should the expectations which they entertained of receiving their arrears from the court be disappointed, they would speedily drop away and leave the King without the means of defence. Under these circumstances it became absolutely necessary that the court should return to the capital, but it was not without long discussions and persuasions that Turenne induced the Queen and her ministers to comply. At the time that this was proposed Monsieur de Villardin and myself had just reached Mantes; and, for a day or two, all was uncertainty and confusion, different reports spreading through the town every hour—now that we were to set off directly—now that the Queen had positively refused to trust herself in Paris—now that we were to wait for messengers from the capital ere any plan could be finally adopted.

At length, however, the order to prepare for the journey was given; and, shortly after, the King, the Queen, the ministers, with a long train of ladies and gentlemen, set out in carriages which had once been splendid, but were so no longer, while guards, officers, attendants, and courtiers on horseback, made up a procession of nearly a mile in length.

In this order we reached St. Germains, when again uncertainty seized upon all our movements; and for three days I do not think anyone had the slightest idea whether the next day would see us on our road forward to Paris, or back to Mantes. The bolder counsels of Turenne, however, prevailed; and on the fourth day we once more began our march, with the addition of a great number of the inhabitants of St. Germains on foot, who swelled the cortège without increasing its splendour, for, to say the truth, such was the poverty of the court and all about it, such was the difficulty that every nobleman experienced in procuring remittances from his estate, however near or however distant, and such was the battered and travel-soiled equipage of all the officers and military followers, that it was very difficult to say which was the shabbiest in appearance, the rabble of carriages, of horsemen, or of pedestrians. We wound on, however, towards the capital, contrary to the opinion of many who were obliged to form part of the cavalcade, till we arrived within a few miles of Paris; but, in the midst of the Bois de Boulogne, we were met by a party of cavaliers from the city, who came up at full gallop, and calling to the front horsemen to stop, approached respectfully to the side of the Queen's carriage. They now besought her Majesty and the ministers to think well what they were doing before they brought the young King into the capital; they represented in strong terms the troubled state of the city, and they assured their hearers that the Duke of Orleans, who had been declared by the Parliament lieutenant-general of the kingdom, was actually arranging a plan for seizing upon the monarch's person, and causing a general revolt in the metropolis.

Of course such tidings spread terror and dismay amongst the greater part of those who formed the royal procession; but upon examination it was found that the messengers who bore this threatening intelligence—several of whom were known—might be reasonably suspected, as belonging generally to the party of the Fronde, which had everything to apprehend from the reception of the court in Paris. Nevertheless the risk was certainly great.

An instant order was now given for the procession to halt, and for all persons, except the ministers and a few of the general officers, to withdraw to a certain distance from the royal carriage. This was immediately done, and the Queen held a sort of council in the midst of the Bois de Boulogne. I heard afterwards that the voices of all, generals and ministers alike, with the exception of Turenne and Monsieur de Villardin, were given in favour of an immediate return to St. Germains. Those two officers, however, so strongly exposed all the weakness and folly of such a step, that the Queen herself and the young King both declared their resolution to proceed, suspecting, what I believe really was the case, that the augurs of evil, by whom we had been joined, had been sent out on purpose to terrify the court if possible, and prevent it from taking a step which would be ruinous to the party of the Fronde.

As soon as this was decided, we once more commenced our march, and ere long were within sight of the gates of Paris. An immense multitude of all ages, classes, and descriptions, was at that very moment streaming forth from the city; and I could see, as I rode along, more than one anxious face protruded from the carriages, to examine the crowd which we were now rapidly approaching. I dare say that the memory of the massacre at the Hôtel de Ville was at that very moment strong in the minds of all. We advanced with apparent boldness, however, into the very midst of the crowd. Several stragglers, it seems, had found their way forward, and had informed the people that an attempt had been made to prevent the King from entering Paris, but that he had determined to trust himself in the hands of his subjects. Nevertheless, for a moment or two, as we came up, there was a dead silence, which, I confess, appeared to me somewhat ominous, till the royal carriage was in the heart of a multitude, consisting of certainly not less than a hundred thousand persons: but, at that instant, a loud and universal shout of "Vive le Roi!" burst from every tongue, and doubt and apprehension were all at an end for ever.

CHAPTER XXX.

NEVER, perhaps, had turbulence and disorder worked its own cure more completely than in Paris. The general ruin which had overtaken every sort of art and trade, had disgusted all those classes, which in times of tranquillity are so potent to do good, and in times of disturbance are so potent to do evil; and they who had been the foremost in supporting faction, were now the loudest in their outcry for general submission. Unhappily nations almost always pass from one extreme to the other; and now yielding too much to the royal authority, where they had before conceded too little, the parliament again verified every edict of the crown, and the people only murmured that the parliament pretended to deliberate in obeying the will of the King. In one word, the faction of the Fronde was at an end, and though a general indemnity was granted to all who submitted within fifteen days, yet the rebel leaders were banished from the capital, and the Cardinal de Retz, the chief mover of every tumult and every intrigue, was arrested in the ante-chamber of the Queen, and confined in the castle of Vincennes.

The greater part of these scenes, however, passed after I had quitted Paris; for two days subsequent to the return of the court to the capital, I once more followed Monsieur de Villardin to the camp. Turenne soon again joined the army, but his forces were now placed upon a different footing from that on which they had hitherto stood. New regiments joined us each day, those that were already collected were speedily recruited, and in taking the field to force the Prince de Condé to evacuate France, Turenne found himself at the head of a superior, rather than an inferior force.

Through the whole of the events that succeeded I continued to serve in the regiment of Monsieur de Villardin, but nothing of any interest occurred in my private history till the end of the campaign, when, after the capture of Bar le Duc, Château Porcien, and Vervins, Turenne dispersed his army in winter quarters, and returned to Paris with the greater part of his officers.

Monsieur de Villardin now at once took up his abode in his hotel in the capital, which had escaped all the outrages that had occurred, although not a few of the best houses in the town had been pillaged at one time or another during the civil wars. His intention was to remain for two or three weeks in Paris, and then proceed to Dumont, to which place, as I before said, Mademoiselle de Villardin and Father Ferdinand had been sent after the burning of the château of Virmont. Ere we had been in the capital three days, however, a messenger arrived from Brittany, bearing the sad tidings that Laura had been attacked by a violent fever, which left but little hope of her life. We were preparing to go out in the evening when Monsieur de Villardin received the letter communicating this bitter intelligence, and clasping his hands together with agitation he could not master, he exclaimed, "She will die! Of course she will die! It is a part of my punishment!"

I tried to raise his hopes, but in vain; and as the next best thing was to force him into activity, I proposed that we should instantly set out for Dumont. He caught eagerly at the idea, and as we could not depart without permission, which was not to be obtained till the next morning, a servant was despatched as an avant-courier, both to order relays of horses to be ready at certain hours upon the road, and give notice of our coming at the château.

As soon as the royal leave was obtained the next morning, we mounted our horses and began our journey. No time was lost upon the road, and in a very short space, considering the distance, we arrived at the spot which had been the scene of so many painful events. It was lucky, perhaps, that Monsieur de Villardin had other matter of deep interest to occupy his mind, and call it from all the associations with which the place was connected; yet, though eagerness to hear whether his child was yet in life was certainly predominant, I could see plainly that his whole frame was shaken, and his very soul moved as we rode through the park to the château.

The sound of our horses' feet had brought Father Ferdinand to the terrace; and there was a bland smile upon his lip, which told us at once that he had good tidings in store for our welcome.

"She is better, my brother; she is better," he said, taking Monsieur de Villardin's hand as he dismounted. "I trust that all danger is over."

"Thank God!" cried the Duke, and without staying to ask more, he strode on towards his daughter's apartments. I looked after him with no small feelings of interest, and, to tell the truth, I would fain have accompanied him to see the dear little girl who had twined herself round my heart by so many strange ties. As I gazed, however, towards the great staircase, down which from a high window the sun was shining so strongly as almost to dazzle my eyes, I suddenly thought I saw a beautiful boy of four or five years of age cross the end of the staircase and disappear in the passages beyond.

Father Ferdinand was standing beside me, asking me a number of kindly questions concerning myself and Monsieur de Villardin, and I turned to him with some surprise as the boy passed across; but he seemed to have seen nothing; and, doubting my senses, I answered his questions without taking any further notice, quite sure that if such a being as I fancied I had beheld was in the château, I should soon see him again. I had many a question to ask in return; and he repaid the account I gave of all my adventures, by a fuller detail of what had occurred at Virmont than I had yet received, and by a sketch of the quiet life he had been passing at Dumont with his young charge, of whom he spoke in terms of the most unmingled affection and tenderness.

In about an hour the good priest was called to Monsieur de Villardin; and, although I was somewhat fatigued, I proceeded to visit all my old haunts about the house, with feelings, which, I suppose, everyone must have experienced on returning, after a long absence, to scenes in which events of deep and lasting interest had taken place. Everything, however, was exactly as I had left it; the very furniture seemed standing in the same places; and, as I went from room to room, nothing would have told me that I had been absent more than five days, instead of five years, from Dumont, except the many changes in my own bosom, which formed a strange contrast with the unaltered situation of everything around me.

As almost all the old servants had accompanied us to Virmont, it was not so long since I had seen them; but I was glad to find that even the time I had been absent had only served to make them welcome my return with the greater pleasure, and, from the kind and yet respectful manner in which they crowded round me, and enquired after my health and happiness, I could almost have fancied myself the young heir returning to his father's house, after some long and perilous expedition. My old friend, Jerome, seemed particularly delighted, and related, with tears in his eyes, how all the household had been affected when they heard that I had been killed on the terrace at Virmont.

In reply to my questions concerning his nephew, he informed me, with joy and pride, that good Jacques Marlot had fully justified me in saving him from the gallows, and had made a happy transition from the state of an indifferent printer to that of a steady, wealthy, respectable farmer. He would be delighted to see me, he added, and to show me all the thriving children with which the good-tempered Brunette he had taken to his bosom had blessed his fire-side since last I saw him. Promising to go down and pay him a visit the next day, I left the good old man, and returned to the library, intending to wait there for Monsieur de Villardin. I found him there, however, already; and, as he was in conversation with Father Ferdinand, I was immediately about to withdraw, when he beckoned me into the room, saying with a smile, "A fair lady has been asking for you, De Juvigny, and will not be satisfied till you pay her a visit. Your playfellow has not forgotten you, I can assure you."

I expressed, of course, how delighted I should be to see her; and the Duke immediately led me up to Laura's apartments, where I found her stretched upon a sofa, a good deal changed, it is true, and pale and languid from the illness she had lately undergone. She was still, however, a lively sweet girl of little more than twelve years old, and, with the same affectionate familiarity in which we had always lived, she put her arms round me whenever I approached, and kissed my cheek as I bent over her.

Monsieur de Villardin smiled. "You see, Laura," he said, "as I told you, he has grown a great man since you saw him, and you must now call him Monsieur le Baron de Juvigny."

"No, no," replied she, half angrily; "he shall never be anything but John Hall with me—the same John Hall who saved my life, and who saved your life, papa."

"He has saved it again, my dear child," replied Monsieur de Villardin, "and conferred many another benefit on me besides."

"Thank you, thank you," cried she, holding out her hand to me, "and pray always do be near papa, and take care of him; for you know I have no one else to love in the world but him, and you, and good Father Ferdinand, now that mamma is dead."

Monsieur de Villardin burst into tears, and quitted the apartment, while our good friend Lise, who had now become Mademoiselle de Villardin's chief attendant, chid her for mentioning her mother to Monsieur de Villardin, saying, "You know, Mademoiselle Laure, he is so grieved for her that it is painful for him even to hear her named."

"So am I grieved for her," replied Laura; "yet I always love to think of her, and hope that I shall never forget her."

After speaking a few words of greeting to Lise, and a few more to Mademoiselle de Villardin, seeing that she was far too weak to bear much conversation, I left her, and, retiring to my own apartments, lay down to rest.

The next morning early I set out to visit good Jacques Marlot, taking the intendant's house by the way, as I had full three years' arrears of rents to receive from him, and it had become necessary for me to put my own little establishment upon rather a better footing than it had been during the war. One of the soldiers of Monsieur de Villardin's regiment had served me for both groom and valet-de-chambre; and, as I now looked upon myself as a very wealthy and prosperous personage, I had resolved that my horses at least should have the advantage of a personal attendant, though I required one but little myself.

I found the intendant quite ready to settle accounts with me, though, in his cool shrewd manner, he cited a good many deductions, which were to be made from the gross sum that I had to receive; some of which I suffered to pass, but some of which I contested successfully, and by so doing raised myself, I am convinced, several steps higher in the opinion of the intendant, who thought the acme of human judgment and discretion consisted in the nice calculation of livres, *parisis* and *tournois.* From his dwelling I proceeded immediately to my own house of Juvigny, which I found so much improved under the care and taste of good Jacques Marlot that I could not help blessing my stars for having sent me such a tenant, although he paid no rent for the dwelling. I soon after found, however, that in addition to the farm of the good Ursulines, which he continued to manage with great care, he rented from his wife's uncle, the intendant, my farm of Juvigny also, which was prospering in a remarkable degree; and in fact the affairs of good Jacques Marlot seemed to have taken a turn at the gallows' foot, and to have gone on in constant success ever since.

The servant who had been sent on to Dumont before Monsieur de Villardin and myself, had, amongst other pieces of news, communicated to the whole household my new dignity as Baron de Juvigny, and as soon as Jacques Marlot beheld me he made me a lowly reverence, in compliment to my new dignity, though with the solemnity which pervaded his salutation there was mixed a certain touch of droll humour, which showed that he had not quite forgot the John Marston Hall whom he had formerly known. Laughing at the *Monseigneur* with which he addressed me, I told him to wait a few years, and, if my fortunes went on as prosperously as they had begun, he should have cause to give me that epithet. After the first salutations he led me into his dwelling, and I found Madame Marlot settled down completely into a pretty bustling farmer's wife, skilled in poultry and butter, and all the particulars appertaining to her calling, while three rosy children, in gradual ascent from the infant in arms to the red-cheeked riotous boy, afforded sufficient employment to all her leisure time.

This seemed the extent of her family; but before I had been ten minutes in the house I heard a step running across the room above, and the moment after the same beautiful boy, of whom I had caught a momentary glance at the château, burst into the room, and stood gazing at me with some surprise.

"What! another! Mon cher philosophe," I cried, "what! four since I left you!"

"No, no," replied Jacques Marlot, laughing, "that is no son of mine, though he could not be a better boy if he were. He is the child of a poor gentleman who was killed in the late wars, and whom we have to take care of."

There was something in the poor boy's fate so similar to my own, that, though Jacques Marlot did not enter into further details at that time, I could not but feel interested in him; and perhaps—for there are, I believe, few people on whom personal appearance has no effect—I might be somewhat influenced, too, by his fine countenance and noble mien, which was extraordinary in a child of his age. Calling him to me, I set him on my knee, and was soon high in his good graces. He admired the tassels of my cloak, played with the hilt of my sword, and was speedily in a full career of questions, which, with childish rapidity, he scarcely waited to hear answered. I found afterwards from Jacques Marlot that both his father and mother were dead, and that he had none but some very distant relations living in one of the far provinces of France. Everything I saw and everything I heard of him increased the interest I felt more and more; and at length remarking that he had acquired a strong Breton accent, I asked the ci-devant printer how he, who knew better, could suffer the child to speak such a patois, adding, "You had better give him to me, and let me make him my page."

"Are you serious?" demanded Jacques Marlot: "if you are, I daresay the matter might easily be managed; but, of course, I must have the consent of his friends."

Although I had no idea, at the time that I made the proposal, that there was any chance of its being accepted, and though the boy was in reality too young to be of any service to me as a page, yet the having once said it, together, perhaps, with a slight touch of romance in my own disposition, and a real interest in the poor boy's situation, made me adhere to my offer; and, after saying that I was serious, I asked who the boy's friends were, and what was their real station in life.

"Oh! as to his rank," replied Jacques Marlot, "he is of as noble blood as any in the land, though poor enough, I believe: but, however, as it was Father Ferdinand, the good confessor at the château, who put him under my care, I must, of course, speak with him before I can consent to anything."

Whenever he mentioned the name of Father Ferdinand it struck me that there was a likeness between the boy and the priest, which might have made me suspect some nearer relationship between them than a vow of celibacy would well have admitted had not the character of Father Ferdinand been of that pure and simple caste, severe upon himself, yet lenient to others, which set all suspicion at defiance.

"I will speak with the good father myself," I said: "what is your name, my boy?"

"Clement de la Marke," he replied.

"And will you go and be my page?" I asked.

"Yes, that I will," he answered, "if you will let me come and see maître Jacques, and the ladies of St. Ursula, whom he takes me to visit."

"Ay, and who kiss you and give you sweetmeats too, Clement," added the good farmer. "You see he knows how to make conditions already, Monsieur le Baron."

"He is very right," replied I, rising to depart: "but, however, I will speak with Father Ferdinand, and if he consents, he shall come up and be my page at the château."

"Oh! I shall be so glad of that," cried the boy; "for then I shall see Mademoiselle Laure every day, and they told me yesterday that I should not see her again for a long time."

I took upon me to promise that, in this desire at least, he should be gratified, and, mounting my horse, after some further conversation with maître Jacques, I rode back fully resolved to speak with Father Ferdinand upon the subject of the boy; and, if he consented on his part, and Monsieur de Villardin had no objection, to take little Clement, and breed him up for a soldier, as I had been bred up myself. However, as I rode on, my romance cooled a little. I recollected that I had seen the child but twice, and that the good father might well accuse me of boyish romance, and treat my request as the offspring of a mere idle whim; and, feeling somewhat ashamed to speak to him upon the subject, I let the day pass without doing so. The next morning, accusing myself of irresolution, I descended early, intending to make the proposal. On going to the confessor's apartments, however, I found that he was out, and when he returned, about an hour afterwards, he came himself to seek me. He then told me that, on going down to the convent, on the other side of the water, he had met Jacques Marlot, who had informed him of my offer.

"I will take two days, my son," he said, "to consider of what you propose; but you must fully understand the boy's situation before you take upon yourself what I conceive to be a heavy responsibility. You must remember that his family is noble, and I must also tell you, that, though he does not possess at present above three thousand livres a year, to pay all his expenses, yet on the death of some distant relations there is a probability of his succeeding to a very large estate. His education, therefore, must fit him for a change of station, while it may be as well not to let him know that such an event is even possible."

"In regard to his education, my good Father," I replied, "all I can give him, I am afraid, will be a military one; but, as I trust that you and I shall never again be separated so long as we have lately been, you must take upon you to supply all that which I am incompetent to afford."

"Willingly, willingly," replied Father Ferdinand; "and I think, upon those conditions, there can be no other difficulty; yet, still, I should like to consider of the matter for at least two days; and, in the meanwhile, you can ask Monsieur de Villardin's approbation of these arrangements."

"Oh! I am sure he will consent," replied I, "if you, on your part, have power to consent for young Clement de la Marke, which I suppose you have," I added with a smile, "for he is so like you, that there must be some relationship."

"It is very extraordinary," replied Father Ferdinand, "but there certainly is a likeness strong enough to be visible to my own eyes; and yet he has nearer relations than myself living, to whom his resemblance is not so great."

Two days after this conversation, I informed Father Ferdinand that Monsieur de Villardin had consented to my making any arrangement of the kind that I liked. He, on his part, signified his full approbation, and, on the subsequent evening, little Clement de la Marke was removed to the château. So engaging were his manners, and so amiable his disposition, that though Monsieur de Villardin smiled at the diminutive size of my page, I myself remained very well satisfied with the transaction; and, fortunately, soon after, I procured a burly Breton as a groom, who made up in size for all that little Clement wanted.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The convalescence of Laura de Villardin proceeded rapidly, and she was soon able to take the air in the huge lumbering coach of those times, which was a very different sort of machine from the gay and gilded equipages of the present day. I was always selected to carry her from her couch to the carriage; and no one suspecting that our feelings would ever become dangerous to our own peace, our childish partiality only excited a smile on the part of Monsieur de Villardin, and was the source of no small pleasure to ourselves. As she acquired strength, it was decided by her physician that exercise on horseback would complete her recovery; and I sought and obtained the task both of breaking a horse for her service and teaching her to ride. She was then as sweet a girl as ever I beheld, and each day was adding new graces to her person and to her mind. Her heart was as gentle and as kind as that of Madame de Villardin, and she had a degree of the same graceful playfulness which I had observed in her mother when first I saw her, mingled with the deeper and more intense feelings which—misguided and abused—had been the cause of misery in her father's bosom.

The hours fled in great happiness for nearly three months; but at length the time for renewing the military operations against the Spaniards approached, and messengers from the court warned Monsieur de Villardin that his presence was required at head-quarters.

It was necessary, of course, to obey the summons, and all our preparations were speedily concluded. Laura and the whole household were removed to the Près Vallée before our departure, in order that masters might be obtained from Rennes to instruct Mademoiselle de Villardin in all those accomplishments which were required in society from a person of her rank; and as my little page, Clement de la Marke, was too young to accompany me to the tented field, I left him under the care of Father Ferdinand, in order that he might derive every advantage from the same facility of procuring instruction.

Before we quitted Dumont, however, Monsieur de Villardin, who never left any service I did him unrequited, proposed to give me, in exchange for the very uncertain pension which the Government had bestowed upon me, a farm which lay contiguous to Juvigny, and which certainly rendered my baronial lands of a very respectable extent. I pointed out to the Duke that the present rents of the farm were far more than the amount of the pension, and that it was likely to yield still more; but he insisted upon the arrangement; and I clearly saw that he wished to recompense the assistance I had afforded him at the Hôtel de Ville, without rendering his gift burdensome by bestowing it in the shape of a reward.

As I knew well that fully one-half of his income remained unemployed, and had long learned to look upon him as a father, his benefits had nothing galling in them to any of the weaknesses of my nature, and I willingly accepted his offer. The necessary papers were drawn up and signed, ere we set out for the army; and I need hardly say that the benefit conferred did not excite the less gratitude in my bosom, because the donation was delicately veiled under the semblance of an exchange.

It will be unnecessary to follow the armies of France through the campaign that ensued, or to trace my own individual career in the service, which was simply that of a young officer, possessed of considerable interest, who rose more by fortunate circumstances, and the exertions of a few indefatigable friends, than by any particular credit of his own. It is true that I was active and vigilant, and did not want courage; but at the same time I cannot but acknowledge that both Monsieur de Villardin and Monsieur de Turenne made more of those qualities in my person than they deserved. After having followed the royal army through all its marches and countermarches; after having done what I could to distinguish myself at the siege of Rhetel and of Mouson; and after having taken part in the deliverance of Rocroy, I returned to Brittany with Monsieur de Villardin, at the end of the campaign, considerably richer in honour than I had set out.

Everything at the Près Vallée was as we left it, or so nearly so, that it seemed as if that part of the world had stood still, while we had been hurried through so many different scenes and events. Father Ferdinand appeared hardly changed in the least; and though Laura had grown taller, she was still a girl. My little page, indeed, had greatly improved; and in the couple of months that we spent at the château, wound himself not only round my heart, but also round that of Monsieur de Villardin himself; and when, at our departure, he petitioned earnestly to be taken with us, I thought that the Duke himself seemed inclined to second his request.

Judging it better for himself, however, I left him for another year, and proceeded with Monsieur de Villardin to attend the coronation of the young king, a summons to which ceremony had curtailed our stay in Brittany.

During the festivities that succeeded, Monsieur de Villardin became first acquainted with the Count de Laval, of whom I shall have more to speak hereafter. He was, as everyone knows, wealthy and powerful; and though he was cold and somewhat haughty, yet he was, I believe, a man of generous feelings, and a noble disposition, of which I had ultimately an extraordinary proof. He paid considerable attention to Monsieur de Villardin; and it struck me from the first that he had some motive with which I was not aware in the advances that he made towards the Duke.

To myself, he always showed himself polite, though distant; and I was glad to find, as his acquaintance with Monsieur de Villardin advanced, that he was not inclined to assume a degree of superiority in his manners towards me which I might not have been disposed to tolerate. He was, as I have said, somewhat haughty in his manners to everyone, but certainly not more so towards myself than towards others.

Soon after the coronation we again quitted the court and joined the army, which began its operations by the siege of Stenay. The Prince de Condé and the Spanish troops having attempted to draw us away, by the attack of Arras, Monsieur de Turenne marched to its relief, leaving Monsieur de Faber to carry on the works against Stenay. I remained with the army of the latter till the capitulation of the place, after which we rejoined Turenne. No sooner was the junction of the two armies effected, than it was determined to attack the lines before Arras, which was accordingly done; and, notwithstanding the cabals of several of our own officers, and the gallantry and skill of Condé, the Spanish entrenchments were forced at several points, and the enemy obliged to retire precipitately to Cambray. The campaign then proceeded with uninterrupted success, several frontier towns were taken, and, at length, after a year of glory, Turenne dispersed his troops in winter-quarters, and Monsieur de Villardin returned to Brittany.

For my own part, I was rewarded for any little services that I might have performed, by receiving the government of the small town of Binches, and took possession of my new command with no small pride and pleasure. The duties, however, thus imposed upon me, of course, prevented my usual journey into Brittany; and although, in the midst of the winter, I obtained leave to visit Paris, and spent several pleasant days with my friend and benefactor, Lord Masterton, yet, when I came to resume my command, it began to seem tiresome and irksome, and I soon found that I would a great deal rather have been in Brittany than at Binches. I longed to see Laura and Father Ferdinand, and my little page, and all the old familiar faces of the château; to spend the days of winter and spring in the sports of the field and the busy idleness of country occupations, and the evenings in reading or in conversation with those whose thoughts and feelings flowed habitually in the same current with my own. Instead of all this I had nothing but the petty state and dull routine which follows the governor of a small town; and all I could do to amuse myself was comprised in keeping a continual watch upon the enemy's frontier, and making such little expeditions as the nature of my command permitted.

In these enterprises I occasionally met with some adventures that afforded me entertainment; but the only event worth relating, perhaps, was the capture of two persons whom I have had occasion to mention more than once. A truce of a few weeks had been concluded in the early part of spring, and I did all that I could to secure to the inhabitants of the frontier lands even a short space of tranquillity; but I soon found that the inactivity of both armies was seized by the hordes of marauders, which a long war had called into being, as an opportunity for pillage and inaction. I was instructed, if possible, to punish some of these bands of plunderers; and having heard of some movements on the part of the enemy, although the truce was not yet at an end, I sent out a party to reconnoitre, who fell in with a body of Spaniards and Germans, and in a charge took about half-a-dozen officers and soldiers, amongst whom were the two leaders of the adverse troop. The prisoners were immediately brought into Binches, followed by a crowd of the peasantry of the neighbouring villages, who charged them loudly with being mere plunderers and assassins, and accused them of a number of acts, certainly not very honourable to the military character.

All this was reported to me by the officer who took them, and who, at the same time, laid before me a number of articles of a very miscellaneous description, which had been found upon their persons, or amongst their baggage, and which tended strongly to confirm the charges made by the peasantry. Learning upon enquiry that the two leaders were Frenchmen, and knowing, as I have mentioned, that, under the pretext of the war, a most disgraceful system of rapine and robbery was carried on upon the frontier, which system I had been commanded to put down by the most severe measures, I determined sternly to hang one of these gentlemen before the gate of the town,—an act which I was authorised to perform by my own instructions, and which had more than once been executed by the Spanish officers under similar circumstances.

Resolving to make them draw lots for the fate to which I destined one of them, I ordered them to be brought before me; but my purpose was suddenly changed when I beheld in the two culprits my old acquaintances, Gaspard de Belleville, and his good brother-in-law, Captain Hubert, who seemed to have thoroughly initiated his sister's husband into the mystery of appropriating the property of other people. What were the peculiar bonds that united them so strongly together I never enquired; although, as I knew that their connection by means of Suzette was not likely to be a very inseparable link, I judged that a similarity of tastes and pursuits, as well as interests and necessities, made them co-operate with the friendly zeal which seemed to actuate them.

Of course, from what I knew of the characters of both, I was the more inclined to give implicit credence to the charges brought against the prisoners; but, at the same time, I saw that if I proceeded as I had at first intended, the many causes of enmity that existed between myself and Gaspard de Belleville might give the act of justice, which I had proposed to perform, the aspect of a base and cowardly piece of revenge. I had by this time learned that it is not sufficient for any man only to *do* right, but that where the two are compatible he must *seem* to do right also, in justice to his own character and in deference to the opinion of that great earthly judge, mankind; and I consequently resolved to waive my right of punishing the plunderers myself, lest the example should lose half its effect by being attributed to wrong motives. I caused, however, the whole evidence to be recapitulated in their presence; and, turning to Gaspard de Belleville, I said, "You hear, sir, the charge against you, and before seeing you I had determined that you should expiate the crimes you have committed by the sacrifice of your life. As, however, there are various circumstances which have occurred at different times between you and me which might give such an act the colouring of revenge, I shall send you and your companion there, back in chains to the Prince de Condé, with a full statement of the case, and will then trust to his Highness's sense of justice to punish you as you deserve."

Gaspard de Belleville turned deadly pale at the first part of my speech, and he attempted to curl his lip into a sneer as I concluded; but the effort was not successful, and only ended in a grimace, wherein the expression of apprehension was still greatly predominant over that of contempt. As to his worthy brother-in-law, his bold bearing remained unquelled; and, remembering me perfectly, though many years had now passed since our first meeting in the forest, he boldly claimed acquaintance with me—evidently more from a spirit of daring than from any other feeling—and replied, "that he was sure I would never have the heart to hang an old friend in his situation."

He spoke with a sort of impudent smile: but, holding the command that I did in the town, I did not choose to bandy jests with him in presence of all my officers; and ordering him and his companion to be removed, I caused the testimony of the peasants to be put down and properly attested; and sent the culprits in irons, accompanied by a flag of truce, to the Prince de Condé, who was at that time in the neighbourhood of Mons. At the same time, I informed his Highness by letter, not only of the facts which accompanied the capture of the prisoners, but of the motives which induced me to act as I did, stating simply and sincerely, without fear or reservation, the determination I had originally formed, and my reasons for not putting it in execution.

I felt sure that such conduct would be appreciated by the Prince, nor was I deceived; for though, in a letter which I received from his Highness in reply, he said, in a gay tone, that he had too few friends to hang any of them himself, yet he assured me that he would immediately dismiss from his service two men that had so disgraced the cause to which they had attached themselves. This the officer, who had carried them to his quarters, informed me he had executed in presence of all his staff, and had at the same time expressed the highest approbation of my conduct throughout the affair.

Though, in my progress through life, I had lost a great deal of that taste for bitter enmities with which I had set out in my boyhood, yet I confess, I did not feel the least apprehension from a knowledge that two men, who viewed me with mortal hatred, had been turned loose upon the world, although the officer added, that, before quitting the presence of the Prince de Condé, they had expressed the most resolute determination to find means of avenging themselves upon me.

This little incident, which possessed some degree of interest while it lasted, was soon forgotten, and all the weariness of my command began to return; but, without knowing it, my governorship of Binches was drawing towards a close. About a fortnight after the capture of Gaspard and his companions, I received a letter from Monsieur le Tellier, which, from its very cordial and friendly commencement, —very different in style and form from the generality of official communications,—I clearly saw was destined, ere its close, to demand some service, or to require some sacrifice. I was not disappointed; for after a number of high commendations, and promises of future advancement, the worthy minister went on to inform me that there was a young portégé of the Cardinal greatly in want of some appointment, and that, if I were inclined to resign my government in his favour, it would be immediately beneficial to him, and ultimately beneficial to myself. To render what the minister believed would be a bitter draught more palatable, he added an immense quantity of the universal sweetener, flattery, telling me that the Cardinal had the less hesitation in making this request, as it would be impossible for the King to suffer so distinguished an officer as myself to remain in the inactivity of a small government after the armies were called into the field for the next campaign; and, as a more substantial inducement, he offered to grant me immediately a higher grade in the army, upon my resignation of the governorship of Binches.

I took very good care, as it may be easily conceived, not to let the minister know, by my reply, how tired I was of the post I occupied, and how desirous I was of returning to Brittany for the two months that were yet likely to elapse before the opening of the campaign. On the contrary, I quietly pointed out how inadequate the new rank offered me was, when viewed as an equivalent to the governorship; but, at the same time, I expressed my perfect willingness to do anything which could oblige or give pleasure to the Cardinal Prime Minister; and I ended by assuring Monsieur le Tellier that, as soon as I received the commission giving the rank he promised, I would send him my resignation of the government in favour of the gentleman he pointed out.

This reply speedily produced a rejoinder, enclosing my commission, thanking me repeatedly for my prompt acquiescence, and promising great things for the future. Extremely well pleased with the whole affair, though very well convinced that the Cardinal would soon find means of forgetting all his promises, I drew up my resignation in due form, and presented it with my own hands to Monsieur le Tellier. My successor was instantly sent to Binches; and, without lingering in Paris a moment more than was necessary, I set out for Brittany alone, leaving my servants and baggage to follow,—preferring still above all things the sort of rapid and independent mode of proceeding to which I had been accustomed before state, or rank, or fortune, entitled, enabled, or required me to burden myself with followers or attendants.

My journey, as I rode my own horse, was less rapid than many of those which I had previously made to and from the same spot; but it was a far more pleasant one. Looking upon the house of Monsieur de Villardin as my home, and upon his household as my family, I experienced fully as much pleasure in the prospect of rejoining him as if his blood had flowed in my veins. I felt greatly relieved, too, by the resignation of an irksome office; and, with a sensation of liberty and independence which I had never known while chained, as it were, to the walls of Binches, I rode on through a rich and varying country, which, throughout the whole of my journey, was lighted up by the sweet fresh sunshine of the spring, and which at every step afforded new and beautiful traces of the cessation of anarchy and civil war, and the return of industry and security.

It was evening when I reached Rennes, but there still wanted an hour or two of night; and, as my horse was extremely tired, I left him at the auberge, and walked on by the bank of the stream towards the Près Vallée. The calm sweet meadows, the magnificent woods that surrounded them, the still silvery river that wandered through the midst, all seemed more tranquilly solemn than usual. A feeling of soft repose pervaded the whole scene, while the beams of the setting sun, pouring between the bolls of the giant trees, and streaming amidst the green transparent leaves of the young spring, cheered away every trace of gloom, and left it all still and peaceful, though anything but gay. Although I was going to those I loved, and delighted in the thought of seeing them again, yet the many feelings of my heart, the memories of the past, the hopes of the future, the enjoyment of the present, all, perhaps, tended to make me linger as I wandered on through a scene that seemed to blend and harmonise with every mingled emotion of my bosom.

I had passed the second and third sweep of trees, had crossed the fourth savanna, and had entered the fourth grove, when I heard someone speaking, and, looking forward, I saw two female figures under one of the trees which bordered the meadow I was just about to cross. They were evidently enjoying the evening sunshine, the one standing with her arm leaning against the old elm that overhung their heads, the other seated on a bench which had been placed at its foot. I had no difficulty in recognising in the first my old acquaintance Lise, the *suivante* of Mademoiselle de Villardin, but I could scarcely believe that the other was her young mistress. It seemed but a day since I had left her a mere child; at least, so gradual had been the change up to the time of my last departure, that to me she had seemed but little older than when first I knew her. Now, however, there was a change indeed. Even before I saw her face, the full rounded contour of her whole form, the very fall of her figure, still replete with grace and beauty —but, oh, so different from the grace of childhood—prepared me for an alteration, or rather made me doubt that it could be herself; but when my step caught her ear, and she turned towards me, I paused in surprise. It was certainly the face of Laura de Villardin—every feature was there, but yet so splendidly changed. The full ruby lip, the dark bright eye, the long black lashes, the sunny cheek, were all before me, as I had known them for years: but there was a new soul in them all —a light, a feeling, that left them as different as it is possible to conceive; and yet the general expression too was the same—innocent, natural, playful. The features, however, had also become more formed: they had lost every remains of what one may call the shapelessness of childhood, and had acquired all the chiselled symmetry of young maturity.

As I have said, I could scarcely believe my eyes, and I paused; but I soon found that, however changed in form, she was in no degree changed in mind, or heart, or feelings. I was scarcely altered: she saw in me alone the dear companion of her childhood,—the boy who had saved her own and her father's life; and as soon as her eyes rested on me, she started up and cast herself into my arms, exactly as she had done when she was seven years old. The same affection that she had felt through life beamed up in her eyes; the same joy to see me again which she had always manifested, sparkled over her countenance; and the same endearing terms of unreserved regard and delighted welcome hung upon her lips. It is impossible to describe all that I felt, and indeed I did not stay to analyse it at the time. I pressed her to my heart as a sister, and, kissing her cheek, led her back to her seat. But as she sat down again, and I took my place beside her, a glowing blush seemed to tell that for the first time she remembered that she was no longer a child.

It passed away again in a moment; and I was glad to find that, however she settled the matter with her own heart, she was determined to let the change be no change to me. My good friend, Lise, too, was delighted to see me; and though eight or nine years had certainly made a considerable difference in her since first I saw her, she had lost none of her native kindness of heart, or cheerfulness of disposition. She loaded me with a thousand questions, admired my dress, declared that I was turning more handsome every year; and called upon Laura for an opinion in regard to my beauty, which roused Mademoiselle Villardin from a deep reverie into which she had fallen, and which ended in another blush.

It was now her turn to ask questions; and many did she put, though in a very different strain from those of Lise. They were all questions of affection and interest in my fate and happiness, without a touch of curiosity; and when she heard that I had resigned the petty government I had held, and was at liberty to remain with Monsieur de Villardin as before, I shall not easily forget the joy that beamed out of her beautiful eyes.

It would make her father so very, very happy, she said; for he had often regretted my absence, and had never seemed so cheerful since I had been away. Often, too, she told me, he had blamed himself for advising me to accept the post I had taken, and which he declared was unworthy of my merits; and she added many another little trait from which she herself had divined, and which led me to believe also, that Monsieur de Villardin had long been anxious for my return. Neither Laura nor myself, however, did anything to hasten our walk to the château, from which we were nearly a mile distant. The scene was so sweet and calm, and the evening so warm and fine, that it might well invite us to tarry; but there was a sensation of delight in our first conversation after so long a separation, which we were unwilling to cut short; and a feeling of happiness, too, in the almost unwitnessed enjoyment of each other's society, which, as it might be long ere the same pleasure was renewed, we were both glad to prolong.

At length, however, the purple hues that began to spread over the sky warned us that we must bend our steps homeward; and Lise, though she had no small touch of romance in her nature, declared that Monsieur would be anxious if Mademoiselle did not return. Laura rose, and, leaning on my arm, took the way along the river, whose glossy bosom was reflecting, bright but softened, the trees, and the banks, and the changing sky above. Our eyes now met, and now rested on the waters; our conversation flew from subject to subject, like a butterfly in a flower-garden,—now poured on uninterrupted, now dropped altogether, and gave place to thought. She told me again and again how glad my return would make everyone in the château, leaving me to include herself in the number; and I thought how beautiful she had grown, and remembered how dear and amiable she always had been. At length the grey turrets and slated roofs of the château rose over the nearest trees; and one of the sweetest and the happiest walks ended that ever I enjoyed through life.

CHAPTER XXXII.

As my negotiations with Monsieur le Tellier concerning the resignation of the governorship had been carried on too rapidly to admit of my writing to Monsieur de Villardin by any of the ordinary couriers, my arrival at the Près Vallée was unexpected: and when, from the windows of the library, he beheld his daughter leaning on the arm of a young cavalier, whose face he could not distinguish in the grey of the evening as we crossed the terrace, his surprise was so great that he came out to the steps of the château to meet us. His pleasure appeared hardly less than his astonishment when he recognised me; and Lise having entered the house the tidings soon spread through the household; so that, while Monsieur de Villardin was giving me a glad welcome, I had my little page, Clement le Marke, old Jerome Laborde, and half-a-dozen of the ancient domestics, turned out upon the terrace to greet my arrival, not knowing that Monsieur de Villardin himself had come forth to do me that honour.

The Duke smiled when he saw them, and, still holding my hand, which he had taken at our first meeting, he led me in, saying,—"You see what a favourite you are, my dear boy; but I will have my turn now; and, indeed, I am almost jealous of Laura for having forestalled me in giving you welcome."

His manner was that of an affectionate father receiving a well-beloved son after a long absence; and as, notwithstanding the propensity of human nature to presume upon kindness, I never entirely forgot that I had been a friendless orphan, destitute and lonely, it may be easily imagined what feelings such tenderness inspired. When we had entered the library, Monsieur de Villardin seated himself at the table with Laura by his side, and with his hand leaning on her shoulder, and they both gazed upon me so intently, as I sat opposite to them, as almost to make me smile.

"Well, well," said Monsieur de Villardin at length, "you are not much changed since I saw you; though a good deal, I dare say, in the eyes of Laura."

Mademoiselle de Villardin, however, declared that I was not changed in the least; and, indeed, would fain have persuaded her father that I was exactly the same in appearance as when I had saved her from drowning at Dumont some eight or nine years before.

"It has come upon you gradually, Laura," replied her father; "but now, tell me, De Juvigny, how came you here, and in whose hands have you left your government?"

I explained to him the whole particulars; which, as he well knew the grasping spirit of Mazarin, did not at all surprise him; nor did the arrangement, I believe, displease him at heart; for, after a comment or two on the injustice of the proceeding, and a promise to use his influence in order to obtain for me something equivalent to that which I had lost, he added,—"But I will take care that it shall be nothing that will separate us again; for your absence has been a loss to me which I scarcely thought anything could now prove, at least in such a degree. That I should feel it deeply, however, is not at all astonishing; for I think, De Juvigny, it is now between nine and ten years since first we met; and, during that time, we have never before been separated for many months, except when you were in prison at Stenay. I think, too, that, during that time, you have accumulated upon my head more obligations than ever one man before conferred upon another. You have been my confidant, my adviser, my friend, and my constant companion; so that I may well feel your absence as a loss which the society of even my dear child can scarcely compensate."

"There now, my dear brother," cried Laura, using an epithet which she often employed towards me; "have I not a right to be jealous of you? and, indeed," she added, "I should almost be jealous of your little page, too, who has completely supplanted both my father's other pages in his affection, were I not as fond of the dear boy myself."

Almost as she spoke, Clement himself entered the library, bounding up to my knee with that sort of bold and undismayed step, which showed me clearly upon what very unceremonious terms he had established himself in the family of Monsieur de Villardin. He was greatly changed in his appearance since I had last seen him, though he was still as fine a boy as ever I beheld; and as tall, as strong, and as well proportioned as many boys of eleven or twelve, although he could not be, at that time, so much as nine years old. There was, too, in his whole appearance, an air of graceful ease—a sort of natural dignity—which was extraordinary in one so young; and I felt very sure, from his whole demeanour, that he had been informed by some one, that his rank and station in society was equal to that of those with whom he was called to mix. The time he had spent at the Près Vallée had certainly not been thrown away; for I soon found that my little page was already a more accomplished scholar than myself; and I easily perceived, from the manner in which he executed all that he had learned of military exercises, that he wanted but habit, discipline, and experience to become eventually one of the best soldiers of the day.

I had always been kind to him during the few months we spent together every year; and, looking upon him but as a younger son of the same adventurous family with myself, I had treated him perhaps as a favourite brother. This had, of course, rendered him fond of me; and his manner towards me was everything that I could desire. There was no want of respect, though it was the respect of affection and esteem; and, though he was frank and bold, telling me at once his thoughts, his opinions, and his wishes, yet it was done with that air of natural confidence and candour that rendered it infinitely pleasing;

while, at the same time, he yielded to my wishes or my arguments as if he felt a pleasure in doing what I bade him, and in giving up his mind to my direction. Whether the affection of my mind that he gained upon his side was vanity, self-love, or any more noble feeling, I cannot tell, but certainly he wound himself completely round my heart; though, to say the truth, during the six weeks that I remained at the Près Vallée, I was very little with him.

Other feelings and other pursuits gradually took possession of me altogether;—feelings which I did not understand, and would not examine,—pursuits, the tendency of which I did not perceive, and the result of which I dared not calculate. From some early prejudice, Monsieur de Villardin had the utmost hatred at the very thought of a gouvernante for his daughter; and though, for the form's sake, he had often declared that he must procure one,—though many of his female relations had reasoned with him upon the subject, and had held up before his eyes all the customs and respects of the world which require such a proceeding,—yet no step had been taken to that effect; and Laura de Villardin, now in her sixteenth year, remained in her father's house with no other female attendants than Lise, her principal maid, and two or three ordinary tiring-women. Masters for all sorts of accomplishments visited her from Rennes every morning; but from two o'clock till the hour of repose her time was all her own; and it was now divided between her father and myself. The vigour, however, of Monsieur de Villardin was beginning to be impaired; and, though he was still a strong and powerful man for his time of life, yet a degree of inactivity, when no great excitement prompted to exertion, showed that years began to lie as a burden upon him. Thus the walks and rides of Laura de Villardin, before my arrival, had often been taken alone, or only followed, when on horseback, by some servants, or, when on foot, by her attendant Lise. Now, indeed, the matter was changed, and I became her constant companion in the rambles which before might be considered as solitary. It never seemed to strike Monsieur de Villardin that any feeling which might be dangerous to his other views, or to our peace, could spring out of such constant association. Doubtless he thought that, having grown up together from very early years, our feelings would ever remain those of a brother and sister; or, perhaps, he never thought about it at all. No impediment, however, did he ever throw in our way; but, on the contrary, whenever he felt any indisposition himself, he was the first to send me with her on any excursion that she proposed to take, and more than once reminded me that, at a very early age, I had pledged myself to be her protector and defender throughout the years of youth.

Thus it was that, during the six weeks that I now stayed at the Près Vallée, I was, for at least one half of each day, in the constant society of Laura de Villardin. A considerable portion, indeed, of that time was spent in company with her father; but I may say no day passed without her being alone with me, either wandering with her arm in mine through the fair scenes round us, or reading together some tale of ancient lore, or sitting at the foot of some tree, and enjoying the beautiful spring for at least two or three hours.

It must not be thought that knowingly and wilfully I took advantage of these opportunities to steal the heart of the young heiress of such broad lands and splendid possessions. I have before said that I did not and would not examine what I was doing, or what was likely to be the result either with herself or me. There was no calculation in the business, no consideration, no forethought. The fascination was too strong for reflection. Her society was delightful to me, as it always had been; and I enjoyed it as I had ever done, without knowing that it could become dangerous. The only thing, I am confident, that even for a moment could have caused a suspicion in either her bosom or mine of what was really passing in our hearts, was the feelings which accompanied our first meetings in the mornings. It had always been her custom—a custom sanctioned by the universal habits of France—after turning from her father's salutation and embrace, to welcome me in the same manner: and whenever we had been in the same dwelling, from our childhood up to that hour, not a day had passed without my lips being pressed upon her cheek, while her fair hand rested in mine, and her sweet voice gave me the good-morrow.

Now, however, I perhaps experienced feelings, at the moment of our morning meeting, which should have told me more. A thrill passed through me as her hand touched mine; my heart beat as our eyes met, and I ought to have felt that the kiss was no longer that of a brother. But it is wonderful how blind people become under such circumstances, and I say the truth, upon my honour, when I say that I did not know that deep and passionate love was growing up in my heart towards Laura de Villardin. If Monsieur de Villardin calculated at all upon the same feelings which had animated us in infancy remaining still unchanged, he calculated not only most wrongly, but upon false grounds altogether. Such might have been the case had we never been separated; but now—at the same time that our youthful affection had prepared our hearts to receive gladly every new feeling that bound us to each other—we had been of late years absent from each other for so many months that each renewal of our intercourse came with the freshness of a new acquaintance, and at length when I returned after a more prolonged separation still, I found the sweet girl, who was already so dear to me, sprung up into womanhood: I found her the most lovely and engaging creature I had ever beheld, while admiration was heightened and softened by a thousand tender memories, and long habits of endearing intimacy.

Still, we neither of us knew how rapidly love was gaining on our hearts—still neither of us made the slightest effort to resist his power or to avoid his influence. Our lonely walks were the sweetest of our lives; and though we were very frequently accompanied by Lise, who probably divined more of our own feelings than we did ourselves, yet I must confess that she was the most discreet and friendly of suivantes, and contrived to throw no restraint upon our conversations. What those conversations were heaven knows. They were a whirl of bright things; a mixture of dreams, and thoughts, and feelings, the blendings of passion and imagination, which might altogether form many a page of wild but brilliant nonsense, if I could write down an exact transcript of all that passed.

We were in love with the world, and all that it contained; and, from the bright feelings that had sprung up within us, everything around us seemed bright. Our whole sensations were a panegyric upon all that we beheld: the sunshine was gayer than ever sunshine had been before; the trees were greener—the fields more sweet and fresh; for us the breeze was loaded with perfume; for us each flower had some new beauty—some brighter grace. We found it inexhaustible to praise and to admire; for everything around offered us the reflex of that happiness which had so lately arisen in our own bosoms.

Be it remarked, however, that amongst all the subjects of conversation which we now enjoyed—and they were as varied as the shapes of summer-clouds—we never talked of love. We spoke of ancient tales, and bright unexampled friendship—the arts and graces of Greece—the virtues and the might of Rome. We spoke of modern days—of gallant deeds in the field—of sad and tragic events—of stories of interest and of anecdotes of wit. We spoke of the beauties of nature, and of all the fair varieties of the world's face. We spoke of ourselves, and our interests, and our feelings, and our tastes. We spoke of our many associated memories in the past, and we looked forward to many a hope and pleasure together in the future; but still we never spoke of love. It might be a deep, hidden, internal, unavowed consciousness, concealed from our own eyes as well as from the rest of the world, that made us avoid—I must call it scrupulously—the most distant approach to that one subject, amongst all the rest of which we spoke. It might be that, by some sort of instinctive perception, we trod lightly, because we found that our feet were upon a volcano.

The fire, however, went on within our hearts, though silently. We drank the intoxicating cup to the dregs, without knowing that it was wine. There was none to open our eyes—there was none to warn us; and, like all other persons in the same situation, we woke not from our dream till it was too late.

Such might not have been the case, had not the only member of the family who was likely to have given us warning and counsel—to have felt for all our feelings, and foreseen all our danger—had he not been absent during the whole of my stay at the Près Vallée. I allude to Father Ferdinand, who, only two days before my arrival, had set out for Dumont. He did not return as soon as had been expected, and I more than once proposed to ride over to Dumont, and see him; but there was a fascination at the Près Vallée which detained me with a power not to be resisted, and I put off my expedition from day to day, till at length an order arrived for Monsieur de Villardin and myself to resume our military duties, and we were obliged to prepare for our departure.

The summons came nearly a month sooner than we had expected, and of course caused no small bustle and confusion, especially as Monsieur de Villardin, yielding to the degree of corporeal inactivity, which, as I have before said, was creeping over him, determined to travel to Paris in his carriage, instead of on horseback; and consequently the time consumed on the journey was likely to be much greater than usual.

I had on a former occasion promised little Clement de la Marke to take him with me in the next campaign, and although I now felt some scruple at exposing a boy of his tender age to all the dangers and fatigues of a camp, yet he pressed me so vehemently to keep my word with him, that I at length consented; remembering how much more severe had been the hardships that surrounded my own early youth, and believing that the hard school in which my education had commenced had been ultimately of infinite benefit to me through life.

The day appointed for our departure speedily approached, and as it came nearer, the hours spent with Laura became doubly dear; nor indeed did she look less lovely, or less interesting, from a shade of melancholy that spread more and more over her fair face, as every minute that fled took something from the small space of time that we had yet to dream away in each other's society. She never loved parting from her friends, she said; and she knew not why, but she felt more apprehensive for her father than she had ever before done on his departure for the army. She besought me to be watchful of him, and to persuade him, as much as possible, to keep out of all unnecessary danger; but she said not a word of caution on my part. A thousand little traits, however, let me feel that she was not indifferent to my safety either, and she took great pains to show me how ungenerous and unkind it was towards friends and relations for any soldier to expose himself rashly and carelessly.

At length the day arrived; the horses were put to the carriage, and Monsieur de Villardin, myself, and little Clement, one by one took our leave of Laura and departed. The tears streamed over her cheeks as she bade us adieu, but there was certainly nothing to point out that those tears flowed more painfully than her separation from her father under such circumstances might well justify. Monsieur de Villardin took his seat in one corner of the coach, and I in the other, and little Clement placed himself in the *portière* where he could more easily see what was passing around. Two other pages accompanied us, and a few attendants on horseback followed, while a number of servants had been sent forward with our chargers, in order to reach the capital by easy journeys. The Duke, silent and grave as usual, soon fell into a fit of thought, which lasted uninterrupted during the greater part of the day; the two pages, on the opposite side of the carriage, were as mute as mice, and little Clement, in his *portière*, was too busily occupied with all the new objects that passed before his eyes, to break in upon our silence by anything more than a casual exclamation of wonder or pleasure, or by some question which he generally answered himself, fully to his own satisfaction, before anyone else could reply.

My thoughts were busy enough upon subjects which were destined to grow more and more painful under reflection. The first feelings to which I gave way were those of pure sorrow at parting with Laura de Villardin; and I felt, for the first time in my life, that faint sickness of heart, which I suppose everyone feels in separating from a being so dear—that sensation of a deprivation and a void; that oppressive sense of the uncertainty of fate, which may ever throw so many obstacles in our way, ere we can again behold those that we so deeply love. Such feelings are painful enough in themselves; but I soon began to enquire their cause. I had been longer negligent in examining my own heart, and in tracing the latent causes of all that was working in it, than I had been for many years; but the magic which had withheld my thoughts from every other subject, and which had cast a veil over every other sensation, was now lost; and my mind naturally turned to enquire what was the real cause of all those new and mingled feelings, which, for six weeks, had been a source of such joy, and which now had left me full of sad thoughts and melancholy forebodings. The truth was no longer to be concealed: the very pain I felt at quitting Laura de Villardin told me that I loved her: the very depression of spirits, and distaste for the career before me,—a career which had formerly occupied all thoughts and wishes—now showed me where my hopes and pleasures all centred; and repeated, in language that I could not doubt, that I loved, and loved too deeply ever to forget.

Such a certainty, under some circumstances, might have so mingled hope and expectation with all the anxieties and apprehensions which follow every strong passion, that the whole would still have remained a pleasant dream to cheer me on upon the path of exertion and enterprise; but, situated as I was, the tardy discovery alone exposed to my sight a prospect of disappointment and despair. What could I hope? what could I expect? I, a poor adventurer, with but the two recommendations of personal courage and noble birth; I, whose whole possessions on earth were owing to the generosity of others—whose way to fame and distinction had been opened by their kind endeavours; could I hope to win the heiress of one of the noblest houses and of the most splendid fortunes in all France; I who had been her father's page; who owed him everything—fortune, station, and the means of gaining renown. Oh! what I would have given at that moment to have had the power of changing her I loved into the daughter of some poor gentleman, who would have gladly bestowed her without a portion.

Perhaps for a single instant one of the idle visions of hope broke in with a ray of light, as I remembered to what stations many young men, situated precisely as myself, had risen by energy and good fortune; and especially when I thought of Mondejeu, afterwards Maréchal de Shulemberg, whom I myself recollected an unnoticed page in the house of the Duc de Bouillon, and who by that time had become governor of the important city of Arras, and was in the road to the highest honours of France. But such dreams were speedily at an end; for every way I turned my eyes some new circumstance presented itself, to prove my situation more and more hopeless. The final stroke of all, however, was when I considered what would be the feelings of Monsieur de Villardin, if ever he discovered that I had dared to raise my hopes to the hand of his daughter; and still more if he were to find that I had attempted by any means to win her affection. Would he not have a right, I asked myself, to accuse me of the basest ingratitude? would he not be entitled to charge me with deceit and hypocrisy? Had I not already in some degree betrayed his trust, unconsciously indeed, but still most foolishly? Ought I not to have looked into my own heart long before; and judging by what I felt myself, have taken every care to guard against the slightest attempt to inspire the same feelings in the daughter of my benefactor?

I could not but acknowledge that if I had acted wisely or prudently, if I had been as watchful for his interests and for his peace as gratitude and affection ought to have made me, I should have played a different part, and avoided the society of her that I loved. I trusted, however, that it was not too late to remedy my folly. Whatever I had inflicted on myself, however irremediable was the state of disappointment and despair to which I had condemned my own heart, I hoped and believed that Laura's feelings had been less interested. If, indeed, there had been anything further in her sentiments towards me than mere sisterly affection, I trusted that it would soon pass away, and I determined never to see her again till I could command my own demeanour, and behave to her in a very different manner from that in which I had conducted myself of late.

I would try to conquer my passion, I thought, or die. I am afraid the idea of death was uppermost from the beginning, for before we had reached the end of our first day's journey, a dream, of a bright but painful nature, flitted frequently before my imagination. The path of glory and honour I thought was before me, and in the same path lay death, who, with his icy hand, would soon cool all the feverish burning of my heart. How bright, then, would it not be, I asked myself, to out-do in the field all that man had ever done, and to have it told to Laura de Villardin, that I had won immortal honour, and died upon the bed of glory? She would weep for me, I fancied, and her father would weep; and if the love I bore her were ever discovered, it would then but serve to shed a brighter light upon my memory, rather than throw a shadow on my name.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It may easily be conceived that such reveries as those which occupied me during the rest of the journey, produced a sensible effect upon my external demeanour. Men may conceal great schemes and mighty designs, and all those enterprises in which the mind alone is concerned may be hidden by firmness, or covered over by art, but the deep feelings and intense passions of the heart almost always betray their workings by some external sign. It was Clement le Marke who first perceived the alteration, and, hanging upon me affectionately, he enquired what made me so sad. Ere long it caught the attention of Monsieur de Villardin himself; and, without the slightest suspicion of its cause, he spoke of my unusual gravity as if it had arisen from disappointment in regard to the governorship of Binches, and tried to console me by promising to use every effort to obtain for me a just compensation. Each new instance of his kindness, far from giving me any relief, only served to make me feel more poignantly, that even did no other circumstances exist to deprive my love of even a chance of success, gratitude to him should teach me to view it with despair. Every thought, every remembrance, showed me more and more strongly that my passion was hopeless; and yet every feeling assured me that that passion was unconquerable, and could never be forgotten. My buoyant heart, which I had thought nothing could overwhelm, completely sunk under the tide of sad thoughts and bitter feelings that overflowed in my bosom during our journey to Paris; and, when we arrived in the capital, I was as reckless a human being as ever despair drove to vice or to folly. What might have been the consequences I cannot tell, for no man should ever trust himself in such a state of mind, had it not been immediately necessary to join the army, and to quit a place in the debaucheries of which I might, perhaps, have sought relief from the agony that preyed upon my heart.

We arrived in the capital in the morning; and while I remained at our hotel, in a state of gloomy despondency, which seemed to crush all my energies, Monsieur de Villardin proceeded to the court, and returned, after an absence of two hours, with a countenance which plainly showed that he was highly gratified by the reception he had met with. He did not mention what had occurred, however, but merely told me that it would be necessary for me to accompany him to the royal presence the next morning; and, as I cared but little what I did or what I left undone, I assented with the utmost indifference, and followed him when the time came.

After having remained in waiting for a few minutes, we were admitted to the royal presence, and found the king—now grown into one of the handsomest young men I had ever seen—in company with his mother, Cardinal Mazarin, Le Tellier, and a number of other ministers and attendants, in the act of giving audience to a foreign ambassador, who was taking leave ere his departure. Our reception was most gracious, and I soon found that the pliancy which I had shown in yielding at once to the wishes of the Cardinal, had established my favour, not only with that minister, but with the royal family, on a basis which might have been very advantageous to me had I been disposed to profit by it. As there was no hope, however, of any turn of fortune taking place, sufficiently miraculous in its nature to render a young English adventurer a fit match for the heiress of two noble houses, I was very indifferent to all the rest. I saw with more satisfaction, however, the marks of honour which the court bestowed upon Monsieur de Villardin; and ere we took our leave was gratified by beholding the baton of Field Marshal placed in his hands by the young monarch, with a compliment on his fidelity and military skill, which must have doubled the pleasure that the distinction produced.

After having expressed his thanks, Monsieur de Villardin drew back a step, and presenting me anew to the king, he added, "I think, Sire, you were graciously pleased to intimate that you had some mark of your royal approbation to bestow upon my young friend, who will, I am sure, do his best to deserve it."

"The commission has not yet received our signature," replied the king, "but it shall be sent to your hotel before your departure to-morrow. In the meantime I doubt not, Monsieur le Maréchal, that you have informed the Baron de Juvigny of my intentions in his favour."

"I did not presume, Sire," replied Monsieur de Villardin, "to forestall the pleasure he would receive from hearing your royal goodness towards him expressed by your own lips."

"You did well, Sir," replied the King. "Monsieur de Juvigny, the honours we confer are always on account of past services, though we wish them to act as incitements to fresh exertion, by affording the certainty that, as far as Heaven grants us power of discrimination, merit of any kind shall never be left without its reward. Since we last had an opportunity of signifying our approbation, you have continued to do well; and, in consequence thereof, as well as at the solicitation of your friend here present, it is our intention to bestow upon you the regiment which he himself raised, and in which you have hitherto exercised a subordinate command. The commission, as I said before, shall be sent to you ere your departure to-morrow."

Long replies are never suitable to any expression of the royal will, and even thanks had better be brief as well as forcible. I had, therefore, no inducement, even if I had been disposed at the time, to be eloquent; and, setting forth my gratitude as shortly but as pointedly as I could, I took my leave and drew back. Monsieur de Villardin also received permission immediately to retire, and, re-entering his carriage, we drove homewards.

If the new mark of royal favour I had received had, in the slightest degree, rekindled the spark of hope in my bosom—and I suppose that such is always, more or less, the tendency of some unexpected success,—Monsieur de Villardin, as we returned to his hotel, unconsciously extinguished the light altogether.

After congratulating me upon my good fortune, which he represented, and represented truly, as opening the way to the highest honours in the French army, he added, "You will be delighted, my dear boy, I am sure,—as I know you take as much interest in my affairs as if you were my own son,—you will be delighted, I say, to hear that I have found for my dear Laura the very best alliance, perhaps, in all France. Yesterday, at the palace, I met with my good friend, the Count de Laval, whose fortune and family and high character place him amongst the first in the first rank of our French nobility. He at once asked my daughter's hand, and enhanced the compliment by telling me that he had determined upon that step two years before, and had only waited that I might become thoroughly acquainted both with his situation and disposition before he ventured to propose the alliance. I need not tell you that I instantly accepted his proposal. But as we both agreed that Laura is still too young, the final arrangements must be delayed for a year and a half."

Luckily it happened that the carriage was at that moment passing through one of those dark, narrow streets which leave many parts of Paris in a continual state of obscurity. Had it not been so, I am convinced that the agony which his words inflicted could not have escaped the eyes of Monsieur de Villardin. It is impossible to describe all I felt at what appeared to me to be a cold and heartless sacrifice of the girl I loved to a man whom she had never yet beheld.

But little, either, could I reconcile such conduct with the deep and impassioned feelings which Monsieur de Villardin naturally possessed, though such unfortunately was and is the universal method of arranging all transactions of the kind in France; and Laura's father, perhaps, never considered it possible that any other plan could be pursued to render his child more happy. Little did he know, indeed, what was passing in my heart as he spoke, or a new view of her situation must instantly have burst upon his sight, however impossible he might have felt it to break the engagements he had already formed. Nor did I attempt to alter his determination, well knowing that no change therein could work a benefit to myself. I replied nothing to his communication, except some incoherent words expressive of surprise; and after they had passed my lips, I remained in dark and bitter silence, revolving acts of madness and folly, which I hardly dare to think of even at this moment.

My feelings before had been all light and sunshiny—happiness itself compared to those which I now experienced. I cannot, indeed, say that I had forgot that Laura could become the bride of another; but even while I knew and felt that she could never be mine, the image of her I loved as another man's wife had never presented itself to my mind. Now that it did rise up before me, it was too painful to be endured; and from the sensations that I experienced during that day and the two that followed it, I gained my first full insight into all those passions which had torn and distracted Monsieur de Villardin himself during the week that had preceded the death of his unhappy wife.

To bring about my own death, or that of the Count de Laval, were, during that time, the only thoughts continually present to my mind, and the idea of the latter was certainly predominant for some time. As hours passed away, however, I began to remember that, even were my own hand to rid me of the rival that had thus sprung up, I should be still as far from hope as ever; and that under whatever pretence I might seek a quarrel with him, and call him to the field, the act itself would be nothing short of murder in my own eyes, and the eyes of the Almighty, however the blind world might regard the deed.

Such feelings occupied me during the whole of that evening and night with such intensity, that I certainly forgot all form and ceremony. I remained silent, gloomy, abstracted; and both my little page and Monsieur de Villardin concluded that I was seriously ill. The next morning early I found a surgeon in my room, who, informing me that he had been sent for to attend me, felt my pulse and proposed to bleed me. Although I knew that the malady which affected me had nothing to do with my corporeal frame, and that, unless he could give medicine to my mind, the most skilful son of Esculapius could effect no ultimate cure upon me, yet I suffered him to do his will, and, perhaps, did feel relieved in some degree from the sort of burning headache which I experienced, as the blood flowed from the vein, and my frame began to grow weaker from the loss of that fluid which had been flowing like liquid fire through every limb.

As we were to set out for the army, however, at mid-day, I went in search of Monsieur de Villardin as soon as the operation was over; and, notwithstanding all his remonstrances, insisted upon accompanying him, declaring that I felt better for the bleeding, and should soon be quite well. Not long after, my commission arrived; and, having by this time given up all thought of making the Count de Laval the victim of my disappointment, I set out for the camp with the stern and gloomy determination of never returning from the field alive. I will do my duty, I thought, in every respect; and by exposing myself on all occasions wherever danger is to be found, I shall surely, at length, be enabled to gain that fate which will set these warring passions at rest for ever.

According to the rule which I have laid down for myself, I shall speak of the events of my military career as briefly as possible. Our regiment had been quartered in the neighbourhood of Senlis, and as the inferior officers were generally steady and experienced, we found it already in marching order when we arrived. By this time Turenne had determined to open the campaign by an attack upon some of the enemy's towns in Flanders, and—being joined at Condé by Monsieur de Villardin, with our own regiment and two or three others, which were now united under his command—that great general first marched upon Tournay. Finding, however, that he had been deceived in regard to the state of preparation of that town, he instantly fell back upon Condé, and thence marched direct for Valenciennes, which was invested the night of his arrival.

Two redoubts were the only defences which obstructed our first approaches; and, having volunteered to attack them, I here made my first essay in that headlong and incautious plan of action upon which I had determined as the means of winning both glory and the grave. However much the first object might be gained, I soon found that fate seemed capriciously resolved to disappoint me of the second. In forcing my way into the redoubts, through one of the most tremendous cross fires that ever I beheld, twenty or thirty of my men fell around me in every direction,—scarcely one of the whole storming party escaped without some injury; but at the end of five minutes I, who had been madly rash in every part of the action, found myself standing unhurt in the midst of the conquered redoubts, with nothing but death and destruction around me on every side. When the whole was settled I returned towards the camp, and was immediately admitted to the presence of Monsieur de Turenne, who had watched the attack till the affair was decided, and who now, in the presence of his staff, gave me high praises for my conduct throughout the evening. The moment after, however, he added, "I wish to show you something, my young friend, which perhaps you can execute to-morrow morning.—I will be back directly, gentlemen," he added, turning to the other officers, several of whom had risen to accompany him, but now paused at this intimation of his desire to go alone, and then taking his hat and cane, he led me to a little mound at a short distance from his tent, where, being quite without witnesses, his whole aspect immediately changed, and he addressed me with a severe and frowning brow. "You have been rash, sir," he said, "extremely rash; and what is more, I perceive you know it. Remember, sir, that courage and temerity are as different as wit and impertinence, and that however much you may choose to expose your own person, you have no right to expose the troops of his Majesty."

Thus saying, he turned upon his heel, and was leaving me; but the expression of bitter mortification which his words had produced upon my countenance touched him, and he came back. "Monsieur de Juvigny," he said, "I am angry with you, because I know you can do better than you have done this day. I do not absolutely disapprove of a young man risking somewhat more than necessary in his own person, but I do strongly disapprove of his acting rashly when in a command such as that entrusted to you this evening. You may receive it as a mark of personal regard that I did not choose to blame you publicly; but at the same time do not let that circumstance deprive this admonition of any of its force, and take care to be more prudent for the future."

Although the reproof I had received was certainly well merited, and sunk deep into my memory, I nevertheless resolved to expose my own person as much as ever, though at the same time I saw the necessity of being more careful of my troops. For many days time seemed to have no effect upon the bitter and painful feelings which had taken possession of my heart, and despair was my constant companion. Gloomy, melancholy, and reserved, I avoided the society of my fellow officers; and at night when I was in my tent, I gave myself up to sombre meditations, which consumed in vain regrets the greater part of those hours that should have been devoted to sleep. Not that I did not court slumber with all my heart, for while I was asleep was the only time that I could feel happy, though it was but the happiness of inanition. In order, however, to gain such repose, I was obliged to labour throughout the whole day, and completely to exhaust the body before I could calm the mind.

From morning till night I was either on horseback, or working as a volunteer in the trenches, or, accompanied by little Clement de la Marke, visiting the different posts, and endeavouring to give him a thorough and practical knowledge of the duties of a soldier. Wherever the thickest of the enemy's fire was directed, there I was still to be found, yet as I showed myself careful of my troops, my conduct now drew down upon me great praise, although the motive, I am afraid, was the same as before.

My little page was indeed a great comfort to me, for quick, lively, enquiring, while he was with me he gave constant occupation to my mind, and from his prompt powers of apprehension pleased and delighted, while he furnished me with matter for indifferent thought, and filled the painful moments of leisure. For the first ten days, indeed, of the siege of Valenciennes, we were in no want of employment, for the garrison took every means which skill and resolution could suggest or execute to delay our progress or to compel us to abandon the attempt. As the force within the walls was but small, an effort was immediately made to throw a reinforcement into the place, and this proving vain, means were taken to inundate a great part of the ground within our lines. To remedy this the cavalry was constantly employed for several days in carrying fascines, for the purpose of forming both a floating bridge and a dike across the inundation, which was not effected without infinite difficulty and loss of time. A worse result also ensued, in consequence of the extensive inundation which the enemy had been able to effect; a violent fever broke out in the camp, and one of the first persons attacked was my poor little page. I loved the boy most sincerely, and I had taken a sort of sad pleasure in winning his affection by every means, and in fancying that *he*, at least, would regret me bitterly when I was gone. I now, however, soon saw him reduced to the brink of the grave, and every moment that I could spare I passed by his bedside. The poor little fellow, restless and delirious, still retained all his gentleness and affection. He would receive his remedies from no hand but mine, and often in the night when he saw me watching by him he would beg me—in sentences confused and incoherent enough, indeed—to lie down and take my rest without minding him.

The time I spent with him was not lost to my mind; for whether there was something monitory in the sight of a fellow being fluttering for days upon the very edge of eternity, or whether my better feelings were themselves struggling up by their own strength, I cannot tell; but I began to reflect upon my late conduct, and to view it in a different light from that which I had done at first. Reason soon showed me that the rash purpose of courting danger which I had entertained was in fact but a specious kind of suicide, a crime for which I had both a great contempt and a great detestation; and after many a painful night of thought, I arrived at the conclusion which I should have reached at first if passion had not overpowered my understanding. I found that I was bound by every tie to conquer the love which had so mastered my judgment, to banish for ever the dream that had bewildered me; and if I could not succeed in crushing my own feelings, at least to conceal them most scrupulously. I went farther: I determined to act towards Laura and her father as if such sensations did not exist—neither to avoid their society nor to let them discover, by any means, that a change had come over my heart. I knew and felt that the attempt would be most agonising, but I fancied that the human mind could perform any task which it undertook, and thus, even with better purposes, I was again led into error. I scarcely know whether I was not deceiving myself, and whether from the first there was not mingling with all my reasoning the latent desire of seeing, once more at least, the being that I most loved on earth. I scarcely know even now whether it was so, or whether my designs were purely good and firm; for of all the things that God has created, there is none so subtle as the human heart. At all events, this book is one of confessions as well as of memoirs, and the facts shall be told as they arose. Let others judge the motives, for no man yet, in every point, has judged himself justly.

At the end of nine or ten days my young companion showed signs of amendment, and the surgeon strongly admonished me to turn my cares to my own health. It became necessary, indeed, that I should be more frequently absent from Clement's bed-side, for duties of a different kind now called for constant exertions. By this time the Spanish army, commanded by the Prince de Condé, had approached within sight of our lines of circumvallation, and it was evident to all who knew that great general, that an attack upon our camp would soon follow. At what point the assault would be made, of course, no one could tell; and, with the small force at our command, it was impossible to guard every part of the great extent of lines. Our infantry did not amount in all to above twelve thousand men, and what with those employed in carrying on the two separate attacks, which were going on against the town, and with those employed on other duty, a great part of our entrenchments were left exposed. Under these circumstances, and expecting every hour to see Condé attempt to force our camp, Turenne employed the cavalry to watch the lines continually, while three regiments of infantry were constantly held in readiness to march to whatever point should be ultimately assailed. All these precautions, however, were unavailing. The Maréchal de la Ferté, haughty, presumptuous, and jealous, neglected the warnings and counsels of Turenne; and Condé, well knowing which of the generals he was most likely to find unprepared, determined to attack the quarters of the former. My regiment had been on duty during the whole day, and after informing Monsieur de Turenne that I had seen demonstrations on the part of the enemy of a determination to pass the Scheldt, and attack the Maréchal de la Ferté, I retired to my tent for the night. It was the first evening that Clement had risen from his bed, and after supper I went into his part of the tent, and sat with him for about half an hour, listening to all the gay visions which the prospect of returning health called up in his mind, when suddenly I heard a sharp discharge of musketry from the side of Azin. Well understanding what it meant, I rushed out, got my men under arms, and springing on horseback, rode towards the tent of Monsieur de Turenne, while the flashes and the report both showed that the enemy were already in the quarters of Monsieur de la Ferté. I found Monsieur de Villardin with the general, and both as calm as if they had been going to their beds.

Turenne was in the act of ordering two regiments of infantry to cross the dike and the bridge of fascines, and support the Maréchal de la Ferté, ere he (Turenne) could himself arrive with a stronger reinforcement.

"Monsieur de Villardin," he added, "I beg that you will remain here, and attend to the safety of the lines between the river Rouelle and the Chemin de Mons. Monsieur de Juvigny, his highness the Prince de Condé is not a man to make this attack without securing some diversion in his favour. Lead your regiment down to support the troops of Lorraine and the household forces, and bid them be upon the alert, for it would not surprise me if Don Juan or the Count de Marsin beat up their quarters."

I lost no time in obeying the orders, while the continued fire from Mont Azin showed me that the business was not yet concluded in that direction. Ere I had reached the quarters of Lorraine, however, a few straggling shots from the lines in the neighbourhood of the little river Rouelle showed me that Turenne had not been mistaken, when he anticipated an attack on his side of the town likewise. I was at that moment within five hundred yards of that part of the lines; and, as there was a good open space before me for the manœuvres of cavalry, I halted the regiment, and rode on to ascertain how matters went. The next instant I met a company of infantry hurrying up; but, before they could reach the palisade, it had been forced by the troops of the enemy at several points; and, though the night was very dark, I could plainly perceive a strong body of Spanish infantry pushing forward by the side of the river. As the force already on the ground could offer no sufficient opposition to their progress, I felt it my duty to bring up the regiment, and make head against the enemy where first I met them. Our own company of foot gave them one discharge, just as I was approaching at the full trot; and, taking advantage of some small confusion which this produced, I charged, and with very little difficulty drove them once more beyond the lines.

The adversary's force was at this point but small; and probably their object was more to occupy the troops of Turenne, and effect a diversion in favour of the attack of Condé, than really to attempt the relief of the town. By the time, however, that we had contrived to drive them back beyond the palisade, a regiment of infantry arrived to our support; and, judging that the camp was now safe in that quarter, I proceeded to obey my first orders, and marched forward to join the household troops. As I rode on I remarked that the firing had almost ceased in the quarters of Monsieur de la Ferté, and I was led to hope that the adversary had also been repulsed there. A moment after, however, the sound of loud acclamations from the town, and a tremendous fire opened upon our trenches—which had been pushed to the edge of the fosse—showed me at once that the city had been relieved. Before I had proceeded a hundred yards farther, I met Monsieur de Turenne galloping back at the head of his guards; and he demanded, somewhat hastily, what had delayed me so long. I had never been famous for using many words, and I now replied, in as few as possible, that I had found the lines by the side of the lesser stream attacked and carried by the enemy, and that I had but paused to charge and drive them out.

"You did right," replied the Marshal, with a smile; "Monsieur de la Ferté has been unfortunate—the town is relieved—we must retreat; but there is no danger," he added, in a louder tone, "if the men will but show the calm courage of true Frenchmen."

I must confess that a good deal of confusion now succeeded. Turenne endeavoured instantly to withdraw his troops from the trenches; but, notwithstanding all his skill and all his coolness, an immense number were lost. Condé and the forces from the town pressed upon us hard; but, nevertheless, we had sufficient time to evacuate the lines, and secure the principal part of our baggage and artillery, without any great annoyance from the enemy. My first care was to get poor little Clement upon a waggon, and to see him safely out of the camp, in which the panic and haste of a night engagement was spreading much more confusion than necessary. As soon as the baggage and artillery were secure, Turenne made no further attempt to maintain his position, but, merely presenting a bold front to the enemy whenever he saw the likelihood of a renewed attack, he caused regiment after regiment to evacuate the lines, remaining himself till the last man had quitted them.

When we were once out of the camp, and in free and open ground, order and tranquillity were soon restored; and so skilfully did Turenne conduct his march, that the enemy, though now infinitely superior to ourselves in number, did not dare to attack us.

The rest of the incidents of that campaign were certainly interesting enough to military men; but, as it is my own history, and not the history of Europe, that I am writing, I must turn once more to the subject of self.—There now existed a continual struggle in my mind, in order to familiarise my thoughts with the idea of Laura de Villardin becoming the wife of another. I tried to impress upon my heart, as it was already impressed upon my understanding, that she never could be mine, and that her hand must be bestowed upon the Count de Laval; and I fancied that, by continually keeping this image before my eyes, while I daily exercised my resolution by the contemplation, I should be able to tranquillise the pain I suffered, and even to quell my love by the certainty of its hopelessness. In some degree I certainly succeeded,—if, indeed, I may so call it; for the object that I attained, was very different from that which I strove for. I did not remove one pang from my heart, but I learned to bear them; I did not in the least diminish my love, or for a moment forget her that inspired it, but I learned the means of concealing it within my own bosom, and hiding its existence, in some sort, even from myself. What was, perhaps, worse than all, at least in its effect, I lulled myself in an imaginary security; fancied that I could command both my feelings and my actions; and determined that, however much I might suffer internally, I would behave in every respect as if no feelings but those of fraternal regard actuated me towards Laura de Villardin. The delusion was one which nothing but love could enable a man to practise on himself; especially after having marked, with keen and interested eyes, in my early youth, the very same conduct pursued by Lord Masterton, and having seen how entirely it had failed. Nevertheless, the deception with myself was quite complete; and though, perhaps, I had that degree of apprehension in regard to my own resolutions, which would have made me very willingly remain with the army, even in winter quarters, had such a thing been required, yet I had so taught myself to believe that it was absolutely necessary for me to act entirely as an indifferent person, that I took not the slightest step to obtain any of those small appointments, which would have been granted me at once, and which would have afforded a fair excuse for absenting myself from a place so dangerous to my peace.

It must not, however, be thought that, on all days and at all times, during the six months we spent with the army, my feelings or resolutions remained in the same state. Quite the contrary; though I have detailed what was the general result, yet my mood and my thoughts were in a continual state of fluctuation; and a thousand trifles would occur, from day to day, to give a new course to my sentiments, in which they would remain for a few hours, and then, after calm reflection, would be overruled by my former determinations. Thus, many a time, a casual word from Monsieur de Villardin, or from little Clement de la Marke, concerning her I loved, her conduct during the past, or her prospects for the future, would throw me back into one of my fits of wild despair; and, forgetting every better thought, I would rush into the very teeth of danger, and court death, like a madman, wherever he was to be found. Then, again, I would fall into deep and gloomy musings, which would occupy me for whole days; and then I would almost be tempted to commit a greater act of madness than all, and, acknowledging my love and my despair, pour out my blood at her feet.

All these paroxysms, however, lasted but their time; and still reflection restored to me my former determinations, which gradually became more and more fixed, as, passing through the rest of the campaign, I followed Turenne in all his brilliant movements and successful enterprises, till at length, in the end of November, the army re-entered France, was dispersed in winter quarters in Picardy, and I returned with Monsieur de Villardin to Paris.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It happened, perhaps fortunately, that Monsieur de Villardin's new station in the army had prevented my being with him so continually as during our former campaigns. Thus the great change that had taken place in my habits and my feelings had not been so constantly brought before him as it otherwise would have been. It had not, however, passed without remark; and the consequences were totally different from those which would most probably have followed had he known the causes of the melancholy that oppressed me. The desire of keeping me near him, which he had expressed on my last return to Brittany, was now increased to a positive determination of not suffering me to be absent from him; and, when I faintly proposed to remain behind him in Paris, and to see somewhat of the court, in which were now just bursting forth the dawnings of that full blaze of magnificence which it ultimately displayed, he laid his hand affectionately upon my arm, replying,—"No, no, my dear Juvigny; you must come with me into the calm quiet of the country. You have over-exerted both your mind and your body; and I see that you are always better and happier when you are with me in Brittany."

I had not strength of mind to say no; and, besides, I had persuaded myself that neither danger nor harm could accrue from my following the course he pointed out. We returned, therefore, to Brittany, after a very short stay in Paris. The journey seemed an eternity; and, when once I was embarked in it, more than one misgiving as to my own resolution and firmness certainly did cross my heart. It was now, however, too late to retreat; and at length the carriage stopped before the grey towers of the Près Vallée. Our coming had been notified beforehand; and Laura instantly ran out to welcome her father. It seemed to me that every hour since I had left her had added some new charm to features that before had seemed perfection; had given some additional grace to a form which had before appeared in my eyes symmetry itself. From her father she turned to me; but I felt her hand tremble in mine, and her cheek burned as my lips touched it. Her eyes, too, sought the ground of the terrace; and her words of welcome were warm, indeed, but faltering and low. Everything told me that the discovery which had taken place in my own heart had been made also by hers, and that, whether she could return my affection or not, she was no longer unconscious of my love. It is scarcely possible to explain what were my feelings at that moment. I was agitated—I was even pained; and yet the joy of seeing her again, and, perhaps, a fancy, too, that my affection was not without return, were sufficient to outweigh, for the moment, all the apprehensions, and sorrows, and anxieties which were cast into the other scale. Her first embarrassment wore away in an instant; and it was easy to see that, whatever she had discovered, none of the pains and sorrows which had become so familiar to my mind, had, as yet, presented themselves to her eyes.

While little Clement de la Marke was claiming his share of welcome, Monsieur de Villardin and I turned to meet Father Ferdinand, who was now coming out to receive us. I had not seen him for nearly three years; and that space of time seemed to have effected a greater change in him than in any of the rest of the party, with the exception, indeed, of Laura, who, from a sweet graceful girl, had grown into a beautiful woman. He was now, certainly, an old man; and a considerable inclination of his head, marked, but not undignified, had taken near two inches from his height since last I saw him. He embraced me as a father would do a son, and asked me anxiously what was the cause of the sad change he remarked in my once robust and muscular frame? As he spoke, I saw Laura's eyes seek mine with an expression of anxiety and apprehension which was painfully sweet to my heart. She spoke not, however; and I replied to Father Ferdinand, attempting to smile gaily as I did so.

"You must remember, my good Father," I answered, "I am no longer a boy, and may well be expected to lose the plump, smooth-faced roundness of my youth; besides, I have seen some hard service; and more than eighteen years which I have now spent—ever more or less in the tented field—may well be supposed to take away a great deal from one's youthful freshness."

Laura sighed deeply and Father Ferdinand gravely shook his head; and I could see distinctly that neither the one nor the other gave credit to the reasons I assigned for my altered appearance. No more questions, however were asked; and all the bustle and the little tittle-tattle of a first arrival in the country carried us well and lightly over the evening. I dreaded, it is true, the coming of the next morning; for now that I was in the midst of the peril, I had become apprehensive of myself; I felt that each night I should have to thank God if I had done nothing wrong; I felt that every day would bring a renewed struggle against myself; I felt that I should look to every sunrise with dread, lest I should fail in resolution during the coming day. Even the sweetest and dearest feelings of my heart were causes of apprehension. Every look, every word, of Laura de Villardin was to me a subject of delight, so bright, so deep, that, conscious of all which was going on within my bosom, I feared the joy I felt in her society would each instant betray itself to others. But that fear was not all that embittered the enjoyment. I felt now but too keenly that I was nurturing a passion which must end in misery; and that the sweet, sweet draught, which I was draining to the dregs, was mingled with poison which must speedily take effect. Yet, now that I grasped the cup, with the full knowledge of all that it contained, I would not have resigned it for a world till the last drop had been drained. I listened to the tones of her voice, I hung upon her every smile; and when, during the evening, with her fair arms thrown round little Clement de la Marke, she listened while the boy repeated enthusiastically how very very kind I had been to him during his illness, I gazed upon her beaming countenance till she turned her eyes towards me with a look of sweet applause; and the feelings of my heart becoming too over-powering to be mastered, I quitted the room hastily, lest the mingled emotions should make a woman of me, and overflow at my eyes.

How the night passed, it were useless to relate. Agitation such as I felt, sleeps but little; and with the grey dawn, I plunged into the woods and wandered on wildly, seeking to gain command over myself ere I encountered any of the family. For nearly two hours I pursued a varying and irregular path, avoiding the hamlets and scattered cottages that here and there sheltered themselves in the edges of the wood surrounding the Près Vallée, and walking on, now quick, now slow, amongst the gloom of the old trees, and by the dim banks of the silent stream. Bitter, bitter was my commune with my own heart, and little way did I make in the attempt to vanquish emotions that seemed to become more turbulent under reflection. Following solely as my guide the desire of avoiding a meeting with any human being, I scarcely knew which way I turned, till at length I found myself within a few yards of the grave of the unhappy Count de Mesnil. Some impulse, I do not well know what,—whether there was a latent sympathy in my bosom with the love, however mad and vicious, which had been expiated by his death, or whether there was alone that thirst of calm repose which was to be found nowhere but in the grave, I cannot tell,—but some impulse caused me to cast myself down upon the turf that covered his remains, and, giving way to all the bitterest feelings of my heart, I wept aloud, fervently wishing that I might soon find a quiet resting-place like that.

Ere I had been there a moment, I heard a flutter of female garments bending over me; and raising my eyes, I beheld Laura de Villardin with her eyes full of tears at the suffering which she saw me endure without being able to account for. I started up, and in the agitation of the moment, gazed upon her without salutation, while she exclaimed,—"Oh tell me—do tell me, dear De Juvigny, what is it makes you so unhappy?"

My firmness was gone before—my good resolution vanished, and pressing the hand that she held out to me to my lips and to my heart, I told her all—how deeply, how passionately I loved her. With the warm blood crimson over her cheek and forehead, she sank down in my arms and hid her face upon my bosom, while a tear or two sprang up in her eyes, and shone like living diamonds amongst her long dark eye-lashes. It was but for a moment that, yielding to woman's first impulse, she hid her face; but then, raising her look to mine, as, sitting on the very grave of De Mesnil, I held her circled in my arms, she asked,—"And is that all? Do I not love you too?"

The hardest and bitterest part of the task was still to come. I had to tell her how hopeless was her love, which her ignorance of the world had not suffered her to perceive; and although I thought I had no right to inform her that her father destined her for another, which I found he himself had not yet communicated, yet I had to explain to her that our union was quite impossible.

"But are we not very happy as we are?" she asked. "Why make yourself wretched by thinking of what you acknowledge cannot be? Why not let us live on as we now are, loving each other more dearly than anything else in life—seeing each other every day—spending our whole days together? Why not let us live thus, and be as happy as we have hitherto been?"

I had to crush the bright bubble for ever. "But," I said, "when you are required to marry some other, Laura, what will then become of me?"

"Oh, but I will never marry anyone else!" she replied, eagerly: "no, no, I love you; and if I cannot marry you, of course no one else shall ever have my hand!"

"But listen to me, dear Laura," I replied, "Suppose your father makes it a command, can you disobey? Suppose he comes to you and tells you that he has plighted his word and engaged his honour that you shall be the bride of some man equal in fortune and station to yourself—will you refuse to redeem his pledge? will you offend him for ever, and bring upon him the imputation of breaking his word? Can you do it, Laura?"

She wept bitterly, and I felt that those tears were a sufficient reply; I was gaining more firmness myself, also, from the very arguments I used; and I went on.—"No, no, dear Laura, we must both try to do our duty: I love you beyond everything on earth; and it would nearly destroy me to see you the wife of another: but yet let us make up our minds to that which cannot be avoided. We can never forget, we can never wholly cease to love each other; but we must make an effort to conquer our love, at least so far as to render it no longer dangerous or wrong; we must try to rule it by reason and by resolution, and to reduce it, if possible, to that affection which brother and sister may feel towards each other."

"Then you must help me—then you must guide me, De Juvigny," she replied; "you must teach me that which is right to do; for I feel, indeed I feel that I am incapable of guiding myself."

"It is a terrible task, Laura—it is a terrible task," I replied—"for a heart that loves like mine, to teach you how our love is to be conquered; and yet the very responsibility will, I trust, enable me to execute it well : but, hark ! I hear a step," and I started up.

"It is only Lise," she replied : "I sent her back for a book ; but she knows all about it. She first told me I loved you months ago."

I wished no *confidantes* to a passion so hopeless as ours ; but ere I could think Lise was too near us to avoid her, and Laura's eyes told too distinctly a part of our story to leave her ignorant of the remainder. She was a good and affectionate, but somewhat romantic creature ; and though the *suivante* would have been the last to counsel her mistress to anything that she believed to be wrong, yet she had too much knowledge of the human heart to believe that a deep-rooted passion could ever be eradicated by the means that we proposed to employ ; and her notions of what would be proper under such cases were likewise very different from ours. As soon as, by one means or another, she had made herself mistress of all that had passed, and had heard our difficulties and our resolutions, she shook her head, exclaiming, "That will never do ! No, no, Monsieur de Juvigny, there is only one way for it. Such love as yours and Mademoiselle's is not to be conquered as you think, and it must have its way, or worse will come of it. I have been thinking ever since you were here last of what would be best to do, for I very well saw the whole business then, and quite understood that Monsieur le Duc would never consent. However, I have a scheme for you ; you must marry privately ; I know a good priest at Rennes who will undertake to perform the ceremony ; and then, when it is found out, which it certainly will be in time, Monsieur de Villardin will be very angry at first, of course ; but then he will soon forgive you, and it will be all settled."

Laura was silent ; and as her hand rested on my arm I could feel it tremble violently. For my part, I own that though poor Lise meant no harm, yet, had she been the very fiend himself she could not have tempted me more dreadfully. Honour, however, overcame ; and after a long, painful pause, I answered, "No, no, Lise ! Monsieur de Villardin is my friend, my benefactor, my more than father, and I cannot betray his trust."

"But is not Mademoiselle, here, your friend, your love, and your more than sister ?" answered Lise, laughing ; "and will you make her unhappy for ever ? But never mind ; I knew that you would talk a great deal of that kind of nonsense whenever I came to propose it ; but you'll see you will both be of my opinion before a fortnight be over, and then it will be,—'Pray, good Lise, seek the priest ;' and as I am the best creature in the world, I *will* seek the priest. So when you have made up your minds to do the only thing that can save you both from a great deal of unhappiness, let me know, and I will arrange all the rest."

Thus saying, she turned away and walked a short distance towards the château, in order to leave Laura and myself time to speak together alone. As soon as she was gone, the dear girl raised her eyes to mine and said—"We must not do it, De Juvigny—we must not do it ! It would be very happy, doubtless, to know that nothing could ever separate us, but it would be at the expense of your honour and my duty, and we must not do it. But, hark ! there is the breakfast hour striking ; we must go back separate ; but you must, indeed you must tell me how I am to act, and what I am to do to conquer all these feelings, and guard myself against wrong. We will walk out together to-morrow morning, as we used to do, and you shall give me my lesson."

But consciousness had, as usual, taken from me my bold firmness. I was not certain that any step that I was taking was right, and therefore I dreaded that anyone should discover all that was passing between myself and Laura. "It will be better, dear Laura," I replied, "for us to meet in some part of the woods—at all events till we have fully determined the line of conduct we are to pursue. Let us have time to think and judge for ourselves before anyone else perceives our feelings towards each other, and assumes the right of judging for us. Where shall I meet you tomorrow ?"

"Since you have been away," she answered, "I have been much in the habit of coming out in the summer mornings to read under this tree. It is one of the finest round about, and if you remark, there is a little kind of rise in the soft turf at its foot, which serves me for a seat."

It was the grave of Monsieur de Mesnil to which she pointed ; and certainly the memories connected with that spot did not render the feeling of my heart less sad. I replied, however, "Well, let us meet here ; we are less likely to be disturbed here, perhaps, than elsewhere."

"That was one of the reasons why I used to love the place," replied Laura : "I never found anyone here yet but Father Ferdinand, whom I one day saw kneeling at his beads beneath this tree ; but it is almost always lonely, and I used to come here with a book, and sometimes read a little : but more often think of you and my father, and pray God to shield you both from all the dangers of the war. Let us part, however, now ; for it is growing late, and I must wash my eyes before anyone sees me."

I pressed her to my heart, and I pressed my lips to hers—I acted very wrong in so doing, I know ; but as I have said, this book is a confession, and therefore I tell all—I pressed her to my heart and I pressed my lips to hers, and then we parted, to meet again the next morning at the same spot.

My next private interview was one with Father Ferdinand. I saw, during breakfast, that he was anxious to speak with me ; but the feeling of consciousness to which I have before referred made me as desirous of avoiding any particular conversation with him now as I had formerly been willing and pleased to enjoy his society alone. As soon as the meal was over, then, I turned, as if to seek my own apartments, but in reality intending to take my hat and once more go out into the park. So well acquainted, however, was Father Ferdinand with the turns of the human heart, and the actions that all those various turns are likely to produce, that he met me at the gate at the very moment I was setting out; and, laying his hand upon my arm, he said,—"I am about to take my walk with you, my son."

I had now no excuse for avoiding his society, and we walked on together, proceeding for the first few minutes in silence. He then began the conversation by telling me that he felt deeply and personally all the care and kindness that I had bestowed upon Clement de la Marke. "I have spoken with the little fellow long this morning," he said, "and from all that he has told me, I must say that, had you been his own father, or his brother, you could not have shown him more judicious kindness."

I knew the good priest too well, and the exact proportion of kindly subtlety which tempered a disposition that was naturally candid, to believe that his sole object in thus forcing me, as it were, into a private interview with him, was to commend my behaviour to the little page. Nevertheless, though I understood all this very well, yet he went on so long and so skilfully, speaking upon that subject, and the events of the campaign alone, that I was thrown off my guard, and found myself detailing many of the occurrences that had taken place, more at large than I had intended, or, perhaps, desired. Observing me pause, as I found this to be the case, he replied, quietly,—"It seems to me, my son, that in this last campaign you have exposed yourself a great deal more than was at all necessary; and, indeed, Clement has told me that you did so to such a degree, that it became a common observation amongst both officers and soldiers that you were *seeking death*.—Tell me, my son," he added, in a more emphatic tone—"tell me, if you love me, what is the cause of that deep despondency, which you cannot conceal from one who, like myself, has watched you, with the affection of a father, for many years."

I felt that to deny the despondency was vain, and I did not choose to prevaricate concerning its cause. I replied, therefore, at once,—"You must not ask me, my good father. At some time—and that ere long—I will tell you the whole. But rest satisfied at present with knowing that though perhaps, as it seems was too apparent, I did seek death wherever he was to be found, yet I have now learned to think better; and, whatever I may suffer, will make such frantic attempts no more."

"I trust that it will be so," replied Father Ferdinand,—"I trust that it will be so. As you tell me not the cause of your suffering, and I will not pretend to know it, I can of course offer you no spiritual consolation: nevertheless, I can perhaps yield you some of a worldly kind. Therefore, let me beg you to remember, before you make yourself miserable about anything that this earth contains, that those things which seem the most hopeless are often, by a slight change of circumstances, brought within our reach. Let my own history be a warning to you. Born to a high rank, and to a princely fortune, from an early disappointment I abjured station, wealth, and the world, concealed myself in the cells of a foreign monastery, and when, at the end of twenty years, I came forth again in the humble state in which you now see me, I discovered that had I but paused three months ere I rendered my fate irrevocable, every obstacle which lay in my way would have been removed, and that all I sought might have been mine. Let it be a lesson to you, young man, and learn never to despair. Now, farewell; and when you are inclined to make me your confidant, you will always find that you have a sincere friend."

Thus saying, he turned away and left me to pursue my walk alone. What he told me was, indeed, intended to produce a good effect; but, nevertheless, the consequences might have been very evil. He raised up again hopes that were better crushed. He conjured up dreams that were only calculated to mislead; and, for the first half hour, believing that he had seen the real cause of all I suffered, and thought it right, from some other knowledge that I did not possess, to encourage my hopes, I gave myself up to visions of joy. Then, however, came the remembrance that Monsieur de Villardin had promised the hand of his daughter to the Count de Laval; and, recollecting that he had not informed Laura herself of the fact, I saw clearly that he had not informed Father Ferdinand either. The good priest, then, I concluded, had seen our love; and, not knowing the engagement which bound the Duke to another, had believed that he might be moved by our mutual affection. Thus fled, once more, all my brilliant dreams; for I was too thoroughly acquainted with Monsieur de Villardin's stern adherence to his word, to believe that any circumstance would make him even think of withdrawing it.

That day passed without any further incident of note. The next morning I again met Laura de Villardin; and each day, during the whole week that followed, we failed not to spend at least two or three hours together—I may call it alone: for Lise, who accompanied her, generally left us till it was time to part. It must not be thought, however, that these clandestine meetings were devoted to thoughts or feelings that all the world might not have witnessed. They were foolish, I grant, and only served to nourish the passion that we believed we were taking means and laying schemes to overcome. The proposal that Lise had made of a private marriage was never again mentioned between us. We never encouraged each other with false hopes, but admitted to our own hearts, in the fullest degree, that no chance existed of our union. The delight of being together we certainly did possess; and it was doubtless the secret desire of retaining at least that blessing which blinded our eyes to the imprudence of our continual meetings.

Our whole conversations were devoted to forming determinations of future firmness and resolution, mingled, indeed, with many a tear and many a caress; but certainly,—however weak was our conduct,—however much we suffered ourselves to be deceived by our own wishes,—our intentions at least were good throughout the whole.

Thus passed the time, as painfully as it could well be conceived, till, one morning, as we were returning towards the château, while Laura—as we were still at some distance from the house—was hanging upon my arm, the form of Father Ferdinand appeared at a little distance in the alley before us. He saw us beyond doubt, for he paused, turned out of the way he was pursuing, and left us to proceed to the house without speaking to us. What might be the event I knew not, but I saw him no more till supper, at which everything passed tranquilly, and we separated for the night.

CHAPTER XXXV.

I WAS sitting musing in my room, about an hour after supper, when the door opened, and Father Ferdinand appeared. He was evidently a good deal agitated, and seemed scarcely able to speak to me.

"My son," he said, taking both my hands, and gazing anxiously in my face,—"my son, I am afraid you have done wrong."

I understood him at once, and replied, "No, father, I have not; unless to struggle against every feeling of my heart, which prompted me to ingratitude and deceit,—unless, I say, to struggle against such feelings be evil,—I have not done wrong."

He raised his right hand, while he still held mine in his left, saying solemnly,—"Thank God for that. I at least have acted wrong," he added: "I once gave you hope without clearly knowing whither that hope might lead you. I now know all; and, I tell you, you must despair."

"Father," I replied, "I have never entertained a hope. I knew that you were unacquainted with my situation, and the dreams you raised lasted but half an hour."

"Forgive me for having raised them at all," he said; "and now, mark me, you must speak with Monsieur de Villardin——Nay, indeed you must; he already expects you. Give me but five minutes to speak with him more at length, and then follow me to the library."

I would fain have asked more: I would fain have discovered what, or rather how much, Monsieur de Villardin knew; but there were so many contending emotions in my bosom, that I was afraid my voice would be choked ere I could put my questions, and I merely replied, "I will."

Without rejoinder, Father Ferdinand left me; and burying my face on my arms, I remained in the same state of mind as a condemned criminal who has just heard an order given for his instant execution. I was not one, however, to shake before any mortal man. I felt, too, that with the power to have won happiness for myself by wronging him I was just about to see, I had sacrificed my own peace rather than act ungratefully towards him. This feeling nerved my heart for whatever might come, and by the time that the five minutes were over, I was slowly descending the great staircase towards the library. I knew not how Monsieur de Villardin would treat me, and I almost feared, from some casual traits which I had remarked in his character, that he might demean himself haughtily towards me. Such a method was not that calculated to govern or affect one of my disposition; and as I passed through the saloon, and crossed the very spot where I had seen Madame de Villardin stand with the Count de Mesnil, a number of services which at different times I had rendered to the Duke rose up before my eyes, and I advanced with a firmer step, from feeling that the balance of obligation was not altogether against myself. As I passed by the mirrors, I saw that I was deadly pale; but I could not help that, and opening the door, I entered the library with more command over myself than I had thought I could assume.

Monsieur de Villardin was alone, and striding up and down the room in a state of agitation that it is impossible to describe. He was at the farther end of the chamber when I entered, but turned round immediately and paused for a moment, gazing upon me with a quivering lip. I took a step or two more forward, and then waited for him to begin; but he said nothing, and advancing rapidly towards me, threw his arms around me as if I had been his child, exclaiming, "Oh! De Juvigny!"

It overpowered me at once: pride, and resolution, and firmness, all gave way; and I wept like a woman, while he mingled his tears with mine.

"This is too, too much," said Monsieur de Villardin. "Sit down, my dear boy, and let us speak as calmly as possible over an event that has made me more wretched than you can conceive."

Casting myself into the seat opposite to that in which he usually sat, I leaned my head forward upon the table, and suffered him to proceed, while feelings that defy all language struggled fearfully in my bosom.

"De Juvigny," he said, in a low, earnest voice, "my friend, my benefactor, my more than son,—twice have you saved my life, once have you saved my child, ever have you counselled me aright even as a boy,—you have watched my couch of sickness, you have calmed me in the moment of passion, you have laboured to prevent me from committing crime, you have striven to soothe the voice of remorse, you have sought far and near to find consolation for my grief—and now, what is it I am called to do? I have to make you miserable. I have to inflict upon you the bitterest pangs that a heart like yours can suffer. I have to deny you the only gift which could fittingly recompense the benefits you have conferred upon me; and all this because I foolishly engaged myself by a promise, ere I knew how much misery it would cause to fulfil it. Believe me, my dear boy,—believe me, upon my honour,—that were it not for that promise, I would set all the world's maxims of pride, and ambition, and avarice at nought; and knowing none so worthy or so noble as yourself, would bestow upon you my sweet child as contentedly as if you were a king;—but oh! De Juvigny, that promise—that fatal promise!"

I did not forget that he had made me, too, a promise in former years, to grant me any boon that I might ask; and the idea certainly had crossed my mind, as I had descended to the library, to demand its execution now. But he had met me so differently from the manner in which I had expected to be met, that all my feelings were changed in a moment, and as he spoke, I could make no reply; for his generous kindness shook and agitated me far more than if he had piled upon my head the bitterest of reproaches.

"Our excellent friend, Father Ferdinand," continued Monsieur de Villardin, "has pointed out to me the cause of all your conduct during the last campaign. Strange your behaviour certainly has appeared in my eyes; and if I remember right, the change took place when I told you of the promise I had given, and gave you news that must have blasted all your hopes for ever."

"My lord, I never entertained a hope," I replied. "Although I believe, without boldness, I may say that my race is as noble as your own, yet I came before you as an exiled adventurer, without home, without country, without fortune, and most presumptuous would it have been for me to entertain a hope under such circumstances. The change in my conduct, or rather the end of my happiness for life, took place as soon as I discovered what were the feelings which I had been nourishing in my bosom. It did, perhaps, add somewhat to the load, to know that Mademoiselle de Villardin was destined to wed a man she did not love; but that knowledge destroyed no hopes, for I had entertained none."

Monsieur de Villardin gazed upon me thoughtfully for several minutes, and then said,—"De Juvigny, I am almost afraid to ask you, yet answer me sincerely, and fear not that I shall blame you, for I have been too faulty a being myself to have any title to chide with others where passion is concerned. Tell me, is Laura acquainted with your feelings towards her?"

"She is so now, my lord," I answered; "but such was not the case till our return from the last campaign."

"You have done wrong, De Juvigny," he said, speaking mournfully, but not harshly; "you have done wrong: but still, as I have said, I have no right to blame you, for I look upon myself as the cause of all this unhappiness. I should have been upon my guard; I should have known that such an intimacy could not go on without ending as it has done; and I should have taken measures either to warn you yourself, or to make you happy. I blame you not, therefore, however great might have been the relief to know that Laura was unacquainted with feelings that cannot be gratified."

"Believe me, my lord," I answered, "I never intended that she should be made acquainted with those feelings, and that the discovery of them was entirely accidental. You will do me the justice, too, I am sure, to feel confident that my opportunities of seeing and conversing with Mademoiselle de Villardin have never been employed to make her forget her duty towards you. On the contrary, our whole thoughts have been turned to the means of overcoming a passion that we felt to be hopeless."

"There is but one means, De Juvigny," replied Monsieur de Villardin,—"there is but one way—to part. To know that I am bound to wound my daughter's happiness, as well as that of a man I love better than if he were my own son, is bitter enough; but still it must be done. My promise is given, and it must not only be held inviolable, but I must show no hesitation in fulfilling it—no wish to evade its immediate execution. You and Laura must part, De Juvigny, and I am sure that on reflection you will find it is better for you both to do so at once. I trust—I hope—that this passion has not yet obtained so deep a root in the bosom of either, as not to yield to the power of reason and the effect of time and absence."

I shook my head, for I felt that such could not be the case; but at the same time I replied,—"It will be better for us to part, I do indeed believe, my lord; for, however vain it is to hope that I shall ever forget, yet my stay here serves no good purpose, and only renders myself and her I love miserable. I am ready to set out even this very night, if you think fit."

"No, no," he said hastily; "not so, my dear boy: you must not quit my dwelling as one in disgrace! That I cannot suffer!—especially when I feel that I owe you atonement for having exposed you to so much unhappiness, as well as deep gratitude and affection for all that you have done for me and mine. No,—your departure must be as that of a well-beloved son, honoured, esteemed, and regretted; and your fortune must be rendered equal to maintain a high station in society, and to obtain for you a ready acceptance from the friends of any one on whom you may hereafter place your affection."

The feelings in my heart were too bitter to permit of my making any reply for some minutes, but I answered at length,—"I will appeal to your own heart, my lord, whether those who have loved deeply and truly ever love twice. But that matters not. In the present instance, you must permit me to decline any further gift. I am proud to believe that, on some occasions, I have rendered your lordship services of some importance; and deeply gratified to find that you value them at a higher rate even than they deserve. But if, as you are pleased to say, you owe me some gratitude, I owe you infinitely more; and though I love you too deeply and too sincerely to offer to restore those things which you formerly bestowed upon me, yet I can accept no more, especially at a moment like this."

"I will not press you then now," replied Monsieur de Villardin; "but we are not going to part for ever, De Juvigny, and when we meet again, I shall insist upon that which I waive for the present. But tell me, in the meantime, what you intend to do with yourself; for of course my interest in you remains not only unabated, but increased, from all that has occurred."

"Oh! fear not, my lord," I replied, the bitterness of my heart mastering me in spite of all my efforts, and drawing from me but an ungrateful return for the kindness of Monsieur de Villardin; "fear not, my lord; I shall do well enough. When I first touched the shores of France, my worldly situation was much less brilliant than it is at present, though I had, indeed, a lighter heart. I have now lands and lordships, and a regiment in the service of the King of France. What need I more?"

"I will tell you, De Juvigny," replied Monsieur de Villardin, laying his hand kindly upon my arm, and speaking mildly, though somewhat reproachfully; "I will tell you what you need more than all,—a friend and companion who will soothe your sorrows, will divert your griefs from preying on your own mind, will point out topics of consolation, will persuade you to think well of those who love you, will endeavour to make you feel less acutely what it may be impossible to forget, and, in short, will act towards you in your sorrows the part which you acted towards me in mine. It grieves me that I cannot be the man to do so myself; but if you will follow my advice, you will seek out your friend Lord Masterton, and, from all I have ever heard of him, I think you will find one who will take a deep interest in your fate, and feel the most sincere sympathy for all that afflicts you."

"No, no, my lord," I replied, "it cannot be. Lord Masterton, happy in his wife and his family, shall not be disturbed by any sorrows of mine; and, however selfish it may appear, I must confess that the sight of his domestic tranquillity would but render more painful the consciousness that such a state can never be mine. There is nothing fit for my present frame of mind but solitude. I doubt not that thought and reflection, before I am called upon to resume my duties in the service, will enable me so far to conquer my regrets and disappointment as to permit of my mingling in society, without much pain to myself or any annoyance to others. In the meantime, however, if your lordship will permit me, I will retire either to Juvigny or to Dumont, and spend a month or two there in perfect privacy. My little page Clement will furnish me with society and entertainment enough; and when, in the course of time," I added, struggling for as much firmness as I could command,—"and when, in the course of time, the last irremediable seal is put to the destiny of Mademoiselle de Villardin and myself, as your lordship will probably be left alone from time to time, I shall hope to enjoy your society, when it can be no longer dangerous to myself, or inconsistent with your other arrangements."

Without making any reply, Monsieur de Villardin took two or three turns up and down the library, and then, sitting down again, he said,—"It is better, De Juvigny, to tell you my determination at once. As my word must be fulfilled, and as I see no object whatever to be gained by delay, I have resolved that Laura shall give her hand to the Count de Laval as soon as it be possible to complete the necessary arrangements."

This was certainly a new pang, but I had already borne so much that night that the very habit of suffering enabled me still to endure. I did think that Monsieur de Villardin was wrong; I did think that it was even cruel to afford his daughter no time for thought or consideration, no time to compose her feelings, no time to prepare for the future or to forget the past. Of course, however, it was not for me even to suggest an objection, and I merely bowed my head, while Monsieur de Villardin went on: "As soon as the ceremony is over I will write to you and let you know," he said; "and I hope that, from that moment, you will be able to come to me and supply the place of the child from whom I am about to part. In the meantime, you must not certainly set off till I have seen you to-morrow; and let me beg you, my dear Juvigny," he added, grasping my hand, "let me beg you to strive for as much firmness as possible. Remember that, though my honour is dearer to me than life itself, yet that I love you better than any other thing, and that to make you happy I would sacrifice everything —*but my honour.*"

"I will do my best, my lord," I replied, "both to be and to appear firm; and whatever I now suffer—whatever I may hereafter have to undergo, your kindness and generosity towards me in these, as in all other circumstances, will be the chief consolation and the brightest remembrance that I have left."

Thus saying I rose and turned towards the door; but ere I reached it, the remembrance that Laura knew nothing of what had taken place during that evening, and would expect me at our usual place of meeting, flashed across my mind, and somewhat embarrassed me. However, I could not entertain the thought for a moment of showing the slightest ingratitude or want of confidence to one who had just treated me with so much kindness and feeling; and, turning at the door, I again approached Monsieur de Villardin, saying,—"You desire me, my lord, not to set out to-morrow ere I have seen you. Will you give me your own directions as to how I am to behave towards Mademoiselle de Villardin?"

"I have the most perfect confidence in you, De Juvigny," he replied, "and can have no objection to your having one more interview with her, though of course that must be the last. See her—speak with her—endeavour to console her—use what arguments you may think meet. I rely entirely upon your honour to do all that you can to make her yield a willing consent to that arrangement for which her father has plighted his word. You will doubtless find ready means to see her. In these respects I ask no questions in regard to the past; and for the future I trust entirely, as I have said, to your honour."

We now separated; and, returning to my own apartments, I busied myself with thoughts too wild and confused to be remembered or transcribed. I had long seen and had long known, indeed, that such must be the result of my love for Laura de Villardin. I had long seen that fate could have nothing else in store for me; but yet I do not think that, even if I had been taken totally unprepared, I could have felt more bitterly—more terribly—the agony of sudden disappointment, than I now felt the severing of the last tie between love and hope. If there was anything in the whole which might have proved soothing, if there was anything on which my mind might have rested with pleasure, it was on the noble confidence which Monsieur de Villardin had shown towards me; but even that was not without a pang, and the sting which it inflicted was bitterer than all; for I saw from his conduct now that had I, when first I discovered the passion that I entertained for his daughter, made him acquainted with it at once—had I, when we were journeying on together towards Paris, poured out my whole feelings into his bosom and confided in him, as perhaps I ought to have done, Laura might still have been mine, and a brighter destiny than ever hope had pictured would have crowned the end of my career. Thus, then, the bitterest regret was added to the most acute disappointment. The cup of happiness had been nearly at my lips; but, not knowing what it contained, I had passed it by, and I felt too surely that it would never come within my reach again.

I knew that such regrets were useless; I knew that nothing remained for me but to endure; I strove even to acquire strength from despair; but it was all in vain. Regret, disappointment, agony, mingled with every thought, and every memory, and every expectation; and for an hour I strode up and down in a state of mind that I shall not attempt any further to depict. At the end of that time there was a light tap at my door, and the next moment Laura's maid, Lise, entered the room. My agitation was sufficiently apparent, and would probably have betrayed what had occurred, even had not the soubrette been partially aware before that some sort of a discovery had taken place.

"Ah! Monsieur le Baron," she said, as soon as she saw me, "I see how it is all going. I have been watching all the evening, and have learned enough from the going to and fro to perceive that monseigneur has discovered it all, and that, unless you will follow my advice, you and mademoiselle will be unhappy for ever."

"And pray, what is your advice, my good Lise?" I demanded; "the Duke has indeed discovered all, but that makes very little difference in regard to our situation. But say, what is your advice?"

"Why, it is simply this," replied the waiting woman; "that you come directly to mademoiselle's chamber, and persuade her to set off with you to Rennes. My good friend, Father Martin, will perform the ceremony, as he promised me he would, not a week ago. Degville, the notary, will draw up the contract, and for a couple of thousand francs to a priest and a lawyer, you will get the sweetest lady in all Brittany, and the one that loves you best."

It is not impossible that, had Monsieur de Villardin said one harsh or unkind word to me, had he treated me with pride or with indignity, he might have lost his daughter; and I, teaching myself to believe that every stratagem is honourable in love, might have embraced the plan which Lise, in her love for the romantic, had laid out, and might have made Laura de Villardin my bride before the next morning. The state of Brittany at that time, and the lax administration of the law, both civil and ecclesiastical, so greatly facilitated any scheme of the kind, that I well knew it was perfectly practicable; but my mind was so completely made up as to the course which I was bound in honour to pursue —the whole of my feelings were so strongly arrayed against the persuasions of passion, that the proposal made by Lise did not even tempt me for a moment. It was unnecessary, however, to tell her all that had passed; and, assuming as much calmness as I could, I replied,—"No, no, Lise, such a course is quite unnecessary. Do not agitate your mistress, I beseech you, by telling her that anything has occurred in the château to disturb the usual course of events; but beg her to let me see her to-morrow in the same place in which we have usually met."

Lise gazed at me with some surprise. "Will they let you see her then?" she demanded: "are you sure of being able to come?"

"Quite sure, Lise," I replied; "so tell her what I bid you; and take this ring," I added, giving her one that I had bought in Paris, "and keep it as a remembrance of me hereafter."

"It is a very pretty ring," replied Lise, taking it, "and I will keep it for your sake with all my heart; but, nevertheless, I would much rather that you had given another of a different kind to my mistress this very night. However, I suppose, Monsieur le Baron, you know your own business best, and so I shall meddle no more."

Thus saying, Lise took her leave, and left me to pass as miserable a night as ever wretch yet spent upon the face of this earth.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Sleep was not to be obtained, and I was up long before the dawn. All the château was dark and silent; but as it was in vain to seek that blessed forgetfulness which only falls upon the eyes of toil or happiness, I dressed myself, notwithstanding the obscurity, and, throwing back the casement, gazed out upon the dim and silent world, that lay chill and vague in the fresh depths of an autumnal night.

A heavy dew was falling, spreading a sort of whitish-grey mist over the woods and falls of ground around the Près Vallée; but the sky above was quite clear, and a thousand bright calm stars were looking out, like the eyes of angels watching the dark scene of man's melancholy pilgrimage. The ground mist, however, and the nearer masses of dark trees, and the spangled heaven, were the only objects I could see as I looked forth, while my ear caught no sound but a light wind stirring the leaves, and the faint murmur of the river, whose rarely heard voice showed the profound stillness of everything else around. Still I gazed out, though it was upon vacancy; for the fresh night air, as it bathed my feverish brow, seemed to cool the burning of my brain, and quell the fiery thoughts that were passing within. For near an hour I continued leaning upon my arm in the deep aperture of the window, revolving things which took perhaps a more melancholy but a less frensied form as the calmness of the night sunk down into my soul. At length, another sound seemed added to the whisper of the air and the murmur of the stream; and I fancied that some early shepherd was leading his flock betimes to the pasture of the neighbouring meadows. But presently I heard a distinct step, which seemed to proceed from beneath a group of trees, at about ten yards from the terrace, under which a walk wound along towards the river: and, accustomed as I was to mark the slightest noise, I at once concluded that it was the footfall of someone who, in walking along beneath the elms, had crossed the gravel. The next moment, as the step lighted on the turf again, I lost the sound; but almost at the same time two figures came a little forward, and paused under the branches of the trees. Had it been any other kind of night than that which it was, I could not have distinguished the two strangers from the ground behind them, but beyond the trees was a deep slope of ground, in which the mist had gathered, white and heavy, and against it both the trunks of the elms and the forms of the men beneath their branches were clearly marked out, though of course it was still impossible to recognise their persons.

I have before remarked that neither Monsieur de Villardin nor any of his household were, generally speaking, matutinal in their habits, and it struck me as extraordinary that any of the servants should show themselves such very early risers as to be out and walking in the woods nearly an hour before daybreak. But I soon found, from the proceedings of the two men who had caught my attention, that they were none of the inmates of the château. They paused for several minutes under the trees, gazing up at the building and scanning every part of it attentively. They spoke, too, in a low voice, but it was impossible from the distance to hear what they said, though I could distinctly see one of them raise his arm and point to the part of the château in which Laura's apartments lay. My own chambers, as I believe I have before said, were situated in the tower forming a sort of wing to the westward of the other buildings; and in the foot of the tower was a door, which opened at once from the terrace to a staircase which led up to my apartments, to the rooms above them, and to the corridor communicating with the rest of the house.

At the end of a few minutes, the two men advanced leisurely to the terrace, and, mounting the steps, approached the base of the château, seeming carefully to examine the principal door, from which, however, they turned again immediately, and came towards the foot of the tower through one of the windows of which I was watching them. As I was now not above ten or twelve feet above the spot where they stood, I could hear more distinctly what passed between them; and, to speak the truth, they were conversing with a sort of cool and confident nonchalance, which showed that they either cared not who listened, or had no fear of being overheard.

"I have known this one left open for nights together," said one, as they approached the door beneath my windows.

"But, if it were, you would not go in?" replied the other.

"Not to-night, certainly," said the first again; "but if we found that it is still usually open, we could easily come back strong enough to do what we liked."

"Ay," answered his companion, "but would the priest do his part under such circumstances? I heard him promise to marry them if they came willingly; but——"

"Give him a thousand francs more, and he will do anything," interrupted the first: "I would coin my very blood to do it."

"It would be a glorious booty, to be sure," was the sort of meditative reply; "but, after all, I think we may fall upon a better plan. We should find it difficult to muster sufficient hands. However, if we once get hold of her, we will easily find means to make marriage the best thing she can do."

"Oh, no fear of that," answered the other; and after a few words more that I could not distinguish, they tried the door at the foot of the tower, and finding it locked, retrod their steps across the terrace. For a moment or two they again paused under the elms, and once more scrutinised every part of the building; and then turning through the dell behind, they were immediately lost to my sight.

What could be their purpose? was my first question; and though I certainly could not find a probable answer, yet one fact was evident;—their purpose, whatever it was, was anything but good. How it might be obviated became the next consideration; and, as I was about to quit the vicinity for a long time, and did not choose to be suspected of any wish to linger, I saw that the only thing which remained for me to do was to inform Monsieur de Villardin of the facts, and set him upon his guard. As I reflected, however, I saw that I might find no fitting opportunity for putting my intention in execution the next morning, and in all that I was about to suffer, it appeared not improbable that I should forget it altogether. While it was fresh in my mind, then, I determined to write it down, and leave it for the Duke at my departure; and having struck a light, I thus occupied myself till the day mingled its purer beams with the yellow glare of my lamp.

Thinking that if Laura had heard of any of the events which had taken place during the preceding evening, she might be at our rendezvous earlier than usual, I set out as soon as the sun was fully risen; and with a wavering step and beating heart, took my way to the trees at which we usually met. Casting myself down upon the dewy grass, I waited her arrival; and bitter, bitter were the feelings which filled the next half hour. About to part with her for ever,—about to resign her to the arms of another—all her loveliness and all her gentleness seemed heightened a thousand-fold by the power of regret. Nor were my feelings entirely selfish; at least, if they were so, they strove hard to clothe themselves in a garb of disinterestedness. "If she could be happy herself," I thought, "half my sorrow would be removed; but to know that my own misery implies hers also, and that she, like me, is destined to a life of sorrow and disappointment, is too, too painful."

At our usual time of meeting she came: and Lise remained by the bank of the stream, within call, but out of hearing of any ordinary tone. I saw at once that Laura was unaware of any change, and her first words were an affectionate comment upon my pale and haggard looks. I would have given worlds that she had known the whole before we met, for oh, how terrible it was to break to her the approaching end of our communion for ever! How I did it, I can scarcely tell, but her grief and agony were far more fearful than even I had anticipated. At that moment of bitter sorrow all the treasure of her heart was poured forth. She had no reserve—she had no coldness; and with her weeping face buried in my bosom, she told me how long and how dearly she had loved me, and traced, in words that only served to render me more miserable, the growth of her affection for me, from her infancy to that hour. I did all that I could, without appearing indifferent or unkind, to calm her, and to persuade her that no course was left either for her or me but to obey the commands of her father; and while I told how deep was my love, how acute was my grief, and how eternal would be my regret, I besought her to forget me, and to strive for happiness, or, at least, tranquillity, in the only way in which it could be obtained.

"De Juvigny," she cried, clasping her beautiful hands, "I will so far obey my father as never to dream of marrying you without his consent; but I can love none other; my heart is given, and for ever; and I will never perjure myself by vowing to love any man, when I know and feel that I cannot do so. No, De Juvigny, no; there is a higher duty than even that to my parent; and it cannot be violated. When I looked upon my husband I should think of you, and I should hate him because he was not you. I should drown his house with tears, and show him every hour that I loved another. No, De Juvigny, no," she cried, starting up; "I will fly to my father this instant; I will tell him all and everything; I will show him the consequences of what he is about to do, and I will entreat him to spare me at least the last and worst part of his will."

As she spoke she turned, and ere I could even attempt to stay her, she darted away like lightning, all bathed in tears, to cast herself at her father's feet, and implore him to change a purpose which I knew too well to be unchangeable. Lise, who saw her pass, followed quick, and I more slowly, feeling that she had herself put an end to our last interview, and that it could never be renewed. Passing by the door of Monsieur de Villardin's chamber, which was not entirely closed, I heard her voice, mingled with sobs, still entreating her father to yield his resolution. I knew, however, that she would entreat in vain: I knew, too, that means would be found after my departure to soothe her, and to persuade her to acquiesce in the views which had been formed for her by her father; and feeling that to linger longer than necessary was but to inflict additional pain upon her, upon myself, and upon Monsieur de Villardin, I summoned my servants, bade them prepare my horses and baggage immediately, and seeking out little Clement de la Marke, I told him that I was about to set off for Dumont, if he were willing to accompany me. Any change is generally delightful to youth, and the boy, catching at the proposal with rapture, flew to make ready for the journey, while I returned to my chamber, to give the last thoughts to all the agonising pangs of my present situation.

Scarcely had I entered it, however, when I was followed by Monsieur de Villardin. He was pale and much agitated; but nevertheless he did not fail to remark, with his usual kindness, the change which had been wrought in my appearance by the passing of the last twelve painful hours.

"You are sadly altered, De Juvigny," he said, "and this unfortunate business will be the destruction of us all, if it be not speedily brought to a conclusion. At present it is vain arguing with Laura; but I need not tell you that at any sacrifice my word must be kept. After you are gone I trust we shall be able to calm her, and bring her to reason; but, in the meantime, for the sake of everyone, it will be better for us to part immediately."

"My lord," I replied, "I am ready at this moment, and my servants have orders to lose not an instant in their preparations. In less than half an hour the horses will be on the terrace, and before night I trust to be at Dumont. In the meanwhile allow me to give you this letter, which I wrote to you during the night, fearing that I might not have an opportunity of speaking with you on the subject ere I set out."

He took it with somewhat of an anxious glance, as if he feared that it might inflict upon him some new pain connected with the matter which was uppermost in all our thoughts; but I hastened to relieve him. "It refers, my Lord," I continued, "to something which I observed last night, while looking out of the window to pass away the time, as I was not inclined to sleep, and which I felt myself bound to make you acquainted with, lest any evil should occur during my absence."

Monsieur de Villardin tore open the letter, and read its contents. "It is strange enough," he said, when he had concluded; "it is certainly strange enough; but we are a great deal too strong in numbers to fear any violence, although I hear that two or three people have been plundered in the neighbourhood of St. Aubin, and that Monsieur de Vins himself was shot at in riding through the forest: however, I will be upon my guard. And now, my dear boy, you must promise to let me hear from you continually. As my affection towards you is anything but decreased by all that has happened, let me trust that your affection towards me remains unimpaired likewise, though you may be the sufferer. No one knows better than myself that the human mind can do but little to master affliction and overcome the emotions of the heart: but still it can do something; and I am sure that, for all our sakes, you will exert yourself to the utmost to conquer the effects of sorrow and disappointment."

I made no reply, for I knew too well how little one can calculate upon one's own powers in moments of passion or despair. Almost as he had done speaking, one of my servants came in to inform me that the horses were prepared, and that everything was ready to set out. My heart was too full to take leave of anyone, and merely clasping Monsieur de Villardin's hand for one moment in my own, I descended as rapidly as possible to the terrace.

I found Father Ferdinand at the door, embracing little Clement de la Marke before his departure. Old Jerome, the major-domo, and a great many of the servants and attendants, were standing round, grave and sad, and evidently aware that something unpleasant had occurred to cause my sudden departure. My own three servants, booted and spurred, stood holding the horses in front of the house; and, as my eye glanced accidentally over the windows, I saw that many a person was watching to see me set out, though I was afraid of looking farther, lest I should behold what might overcome my resolution. Saying a few words to Father Ferdinand, I walked direct towards my horse; but, as I was going to mount, I found that Monsieur de Villardin himself, anxious to deprive my situation of any unnecessary pain, had followed me out to take leave of me in the kindest manner before all those who were looking on. Laying his hand upon my arm, as I was just about to put my foot in the stirrup, he embraced me affectionately, saying, "Heaven bless you, my dear boy; let me hear from you directly." He then turned, and patted the head of little Clement de la Marke, wishing him a safe journey; and then looked round again to me, with an anxious and even hesitating glance, as if he would fain, fain have yielded all, and forbidden my departure.

I felt that I could bear no more; and leaping into the saddle, I struck my horse with the spur, and galloped away from the Près Vallée and the many dear objects that it contained. Those who have lost all that was nearest to their heart on earth may judge what were my feelings for the first ten miles. It were useless to detail all that I experienced;—the bitter disappointment, the burning regret, the swelling of the sad heart, the fire of the agitated brain. I have spoken of it all too much already; and, besides, it is impossible to give any idea of sensations which I do not believe that many can feel, and which those who can feel must know that it is impossible to relate.

My thoughts in regard to Laura were, indeed, a wild chaos of everything painful and distressing, without form or consistency. Towards Monsieur de Villardin, however, my feelings were more clearly defined; and, notwithstanding all that I suffered, I did full justice to the noble and generous conduct which he had displayed towards me. I saw and felt even then, that his kindness—that his generous sympathy, under the painful circumstances in which I was placed, would, at some future period, when time should have softened the pangs that it could never cure, become one of the sweetest memories for my after years, and bind me to that noble-hearted man by a tie that could never be broken. I saw, too, in examining his behaviour, that the memory of all he himself had felt had greatly influenced his conduct. It was the same noble spirit which, moved by passion and by the arts of others to absolute madness, had in former days caused his own wretchedness and misery, that now, divested of any personal passion, softened and purified by long years of sorrow and regret, led him to sympathise deeply and sincerely with two hearts, which he was bound by an obligation he could not violate to tear asunder. His unshaken kindness—the generous confidence that he had reposed in me, which was the more touching from his heart not being naturally a confiding one—the sympathy he had shown—the allowances he had made—all affected me much; and, although I could not but think he was wrong in not permitting Laura to decide for herself, though I thought that no promise could bind a father to use absolute compulsion with his child, yet his conduct towards myself left me without a word to say, and made me love him the more deeply even while he inflicted the most bitter of disappointments.

These were the only alleviating feelings which my heart experienced, as I rode on towards Dumont. All the rest was bitterness itself; and although I had by this time made up my mind to the belief that it would be criminal to expose myself to danger in a greater degree now than I would have done upon any other occasion, yet I acknowledge that I was in that frame of mind in which death would have been a relief, and that I should have blessed the hand which took a life that I looked upon as a prolongation of misery through a long and tedious series of years. Such were my thoughts as I rode through a part of the forest in which Monsieur de Villardin had told me that some outrages had lately been committed; and I could not help feeling that if a chance shot from some of the plunderers that still infested the country were to lay me low, it would be but a happy termination of sufferings to which I now saw no end. Death, however, has his own appointed time; and as it is vain to fly from him, so also is it vain to seek him ere the moment be come. Nothing disturbed me on my journey; no sign of marauders was visible as I rode along; not a creature did I meet but a forester with his axe upon his shoulder, and a thin priest riding quickly along on his ambling palfrey. Such were the only sights which I saw in the forest, except the tall trees, and the yellow banks, and the jays fluttering and chattering from bough to bough.

Sombre and silent as was every feeling of my bosom, my little page Clement endeavoured in vain to seduce me into conversation while we rode along; but still nothing could repress the joy of his heart; and, indeed, no small delight did he seem to experience at the idea of revisiting Dumont, and the scenes in which I had first found him, of all which he had preserved the most perfect recollection, and for which he seemed to entertain a peculiar regard. After riding about twenty miles, we paused to refresh our horses, and remembering that the boy's frame was not so strong as my own, I asked him if he were fatigued, and would like to remain for the night at the auberge where we had made our halt; but he declared eagerly that he was not tired in the least, and that he had much rather proceed to Dumont as fast as possible. After a short repose, then, we resumed our journey, and reached the place of our destination before night.

One or two female servants, who had remained in the château, soon put my apartments in order; but still, about the whole place, there was that air of chilly solitude which every house gains by being left long unoccupied. My own heart had no gay feelings to cheer or enliven it; all the memories associated with every object around me were of the most gloomy and painful description; the sear leaves of autumn were upon every tree; a dull covering of grey vapour veiled the brightness of the sky; a sharp, parching wind was blowing the clouds of dust down the dim, deserted avenues of the park; while the closed windows of the greater part of the building spoke the want of inhabitants, and the aspect of everything harmonised too well with the dark and sombre thoughts that crowded my own bosom. I have felt pain, and anxiety, and misery at different periods of my life; but I never, throughout the whole range of remembrance, can call to mind having experienced such deep despondency as on that night of my arrival at Dumont.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The greatest blessing that could befall me, under such circumstances as I have described, was sleep procured by great corporeal exhaustion. I had not closed an eye the night before; I had slept but little on those that preceded it; and now a ride of forty miles, without having taken any sort of refreshment, had greatly wearied me. When I lay down to seek repose, then, I found it; and though it was far from that sweet, calm slumber which I had known in former years, yet still it was a relief. The first part of the night I was tormented with dreams; and more than once I started up and found myself, ere I was well awake, laying my hand upon my sword, which I had cast down by my bedside on going to rest. Less disturbed repose, however, came with the morning; and when I awoke, I found that the sun had risen more than an hour. I was glad that it was so, for my days were without object, and my waking hours were sure to be hours of pain.

Nevertheless, it must not be supposed that I abandoned myself weakly to thoughts which were only calculated to unnerve my mind, or that I determined purposely to cultivate the feelings which made life so bitter; far from it; I knew, indeed, that those thoughts and those feelings would engross my heart and mind, by whatever means or devices I might attempt to banish them; but at the same time, I resolved to do all that lay within my power to turn my attention to other things, and to occupy myself with studies and pursuits that might give me relief. I laid out many a plan for the day, so as, if possible, to leave not a moment vacant for regret and sorrow to intrude themselves upon me. In the first place, I thought I would read for a couple of hours, and then I would trace down the bank of the stream to the spot where the unhappy Duchess de Villardin had perished; I would then ride out to Juvigny, and, seeing Jacques Marlot, would examine all that was passing on the estate, and by planning with him every improvement I could think of, would endeavour to furnish occupation for many succeeding days.

In my very first attempt, however, I found how foolish it was to make such calculations. There stood the little library which had been given to me by Father Ferdinand, and certainly it contained many a book which might have afforded matter for instruction, consolation, and amusement; but I took down one after another and attempted to read in vain. My eyes wandered over the lines, my hands turned the pages, I caught now and then the sense of a sentence or a paragraph; but, upon the whole, I was reading without understanding, and nine times out of ten I could not have told whether the words were French, or Latin, or Arabic. Fancying that it was something dry and dull in the nature of the good priest's selection which prevented me from attending, I went down to the great library, caused the windows to be thrown open, and chose whatever I thought was most likely to attract and please me: but it was still the same. Replacing the books, I determined not to attempt to read till my mind was more calm; and, in the meantime, by combining corporeal with mental occupation, to force my thoughts from the channel in which they were so strongly disposed to flow.

I now remembered that I had not seen my little page during the morning, and, on enquiry, found that he had gone out by daybreak, and had not yet returned.

He was probably gone to Juvigny, old Marguerite, who had been helping me in the library, observed; for when last he had been there with Father Ferdinand, she said, the boy had never been absent from that place. Indeed he seemed as fond of that fellow Jacques Marlot, as if he were his own father—he might be so too, she added, for aught that ever she could discover. But the boy was a pretty boy, too, and not like that ugly cock-nosed scapegrace.

In despite of all my gloom, the spite of the old woman towards my poor acquaintance, Jacques Marlot, made me smile for a moment; and taking my hat, I ordered my horses to be ready in an hour, and walked out to the banks of the stream, in order to see whether the second occupation which I had laid out for myself would be attended with more success than the first. But my walk was in every respect a melancholy one, as, indeed, I might well have anticipated, had I allowed myself to judge as rationally of my own feelings and their associations as I should have done had the case been that of another. My first halt was at the spot where I had rescued poor Laura from the fatal stream that afterwards swept away her unhappy mother; and as I stood and gazed upon the river, I could not but think how much misery would have been saved us had the dull and sullen water that rolled deep and dark before me taken us both for ever to its silent bosom. Memory, too, exerted all her power, and I could see before the mind's eye the dear girl I loved, in all the smiling happiness of infant joy, run bounding on to meet me, as she had appeared the moment before she fell into the stream. I recalled, too, as vividly as if it had just passed, the heartfelt gladness with which I had grasped her fairy form in the midst of the waters, and the sort of triumphant joy with which I had held her up rescued towards those who watched us from the brink. I remembered it all as if it had been a thing of yesterday; but I remembered at the same moment, my existing situation; and the bitter comment of the present on the past poured like a torrent upon my heart and almost drowned hope for ever.

I turned away, for in the state of my feelings I would rather have rested in spots, the associations of which were painful in themselves, than in those where happy memories formed a dreadful contrast with present misery. I turned away, then, and walked slowly on to the broken bridge which remained still unrepaired, and was exactly in the state in which it had been left on the night of Madame de Villardin's death, except that a quantity of green mould, and many coloured lichens, had grown over the broken woodwork, telling how many years had passed since the fall of the rest had taken place. Grief, however, finds matter to increase its own stores in everything; and when I thought of Madame de Villardin's unhappy fate, of her affection for her husband so terribly repaid, of his love for her proving a source of the bitterest anguish to himself, and of all the fearful scenes which I had witnessed and in which I had taken a part, I began to think—without feeling my own unhappiness relieved in the least by the belief—I began to think that the whole world, and every state and action in it, were full of misery to the overflowing—that each feeling, virtuous or vicious, was alike prolific of sorrow—and that the only happy being on the earth was the stoic or the anchorite, the pure egotist, or the mindless fool.

If I went out gloomy, I returned home more gloomy still, and, mounting my horse, which was by this time prepared, I rode back to Juvigny, and entered the house which I had lent to Jacques Marlot. The good farmer was out, but Madame Marlot, who now presented the very best possible image of a *bonne fermière*, adorned with fine white muslin, a profusion of lace, and manifold gold ornaments, received me at the gate, and gave me ocular proof of her husband's increasing prosperity. My visit had evidently been expected, and on enquiring for my little page, I was informed that he had been there since an early hour in the morning, but had gone out upon his rounds with Jacques Marlot, who would return with him directly.

The ci-devant printer was not long in making his appearance, and I soon found from his manner that little Clement had informed him that some events had lately occurred to render my mind not attuned to the pleasantries with which he was wont to treat me. He was consequently grave and calm, and though an occasional little drop of acid humour would mix with what he said, yet our conversation passed much as a matter of business; and highly approving of my intention of making improvements, he went over my two farms with me, pointing out all that he thought might be done. We thus planned a new road, and a number of plantations, and having provided employment for myself for several days in inspecting the progress of the workmen, I returned to Dumont, feeling that at all events I had found an occupation which would distract some of my thoughts from the more painful theme.

Day after day I returned to Juvigny, and carrying on several operations at one time, I had an opportunity of diversifying my amusement; thus waging a sort of incessant war against thought. As soon as I found that painful ideas were obtruding upon me I changed my place at once, and went to the workmen engaged in some other undertaking; and, thanks to their blessed stupidity, I always discovered some matter to set right or some mistake to rectify. Thus passed my days for more than a fortnight, and though the long dull evenings were still terrible, yet the occupation of my thoughts during the hours of light was in itself a great relief. My little page, wild as the winds, left me almost entirely to myself, and although it had been a part of my plan to fill up my vacant time by pursuing the task of his education, yet my mind was not equal to it; and I soon found that I could not bend my thoughts to the subject with sufficient application to do him any good or myself either. Thus from nightfall to midnight my hours were generally spent in walking up and down the great library, sometimes forcing myself to read for a few minutes, but generally giving full course to the thoughts which I contrived to avoid, more or less, during the day.

At length, however, a messenger arrived from the Près Vallée, bringing me letters, which again rendered every effort to occupy my mind perfectly vain. The first was from Monsieur de Villardin, and was full of the kindest and most affectionate language; but it went on to inform me that the Count de Laval had arrived at the château, and that his marriage was fixed for that day week. Feeling it necessary to inform me of the fact, and yet knowing that every word upon the subject was a dagger in my heart, Monsieur de Villardin wrote as briefly upon it as possible, simply telling me the bare facts, and then adding, "Laura is calm."

The next was a letter from Father Ferdinand, but it was more full, more interesting, and yet more painful. I give it, therefore, as it was, so far, at least, as translation can render it:—

"MY DEAR SON,—Although Monsieur de Villardin has written to you himself, I feel it necessary to address you also as one who loves you sincerely, and whose wishes are all for your future welfare and happiness. In the first place, however, let me say that although I doubt not you may think I outstepped my duty and interfered, perhaps cruelly, in informing the Duke of the mutual affection which existed between Laura and yourself, yet I had an undoubted right to do so, founded on circumstances which you do not know, but which shall one day be explained to you. In other respects some words that I once let drop, which might tend to encourage your passion, still rest upon my conscience; but my error in having spoken them is attributable in some degree to Monsieur de Villardin himself, who did not inform me, as he ought to have done at an earlier period, that he had promised the hand of his daughter to another.

"*The future husband of Laura de Villardin* is now here, and while I acknowledge my regret that in every respect he does not resemble yourself, yet he seems a noble and dignified man, with whom, I trust, she will find peace, if not happiness. The day of marriage is fixed for this day week, and beyond all doubt it will then take place. Laura is calm and composed, and her mind appears made up to her fate; but at the same time it is useless to dissemble that she suffers much. In speaking thus, my son, I have the utmost reliance on those good principles which I have marked with pleasure daily taking firmer root in your bosom; and on those generous feelings which I have often seen make you prefer the happiness of others to your own. I know that man can hardly love woman better than you love her who is now about to become the wife of another; and I believe that your love for her will not decay; but I believe at the same time that her tranquillity and peace of mind will ever be your first desire; and on this ground I entreat, I beseech, I command you never to see her after her marriage till long years have calmed and softened feelings that are now too vehement for control. If, indeed, you do love her sincerely, such will be your course; and the blessing of a quiet conscience, and the knowledge of having acted nobly under the most trying circumstances, will follow such conduct, and cannot fail to assuage your grief.

"Ere long I shall again see you, at least if you remain at Dumont; for as soon as the marriage is over, Monsieur de Villardin and all his family set out for Paris. On the same day I leave the Près Vallée for Rennes, where I shall spend but three days in necessary business, and will then join you. I hope to give you consolation, and at all events to be enabled to afford you some support under the bitter disappointment which you suffer. From these circumstances, and knowing how painful all the details must be to you, I shall not write again till we meet; and in the meantime may God bless and comfort you, and give you strength, and wisdom, and faith, to bear the dispensation of His will without murmurs or repining."

The effect of these letters upon my mind may be conceived. No occupation now took any hold upon my thoughts; and the whole of the next week was spent in wandering about in a state of despairing wretchedness, that made me almost think the use of my reason would abandon me. I read over and over again the letters which conveyed to me the intelligence of the near approach of my beloved Laura's marriage to another; and, instead of feeling soothed by the terms of affection and consolation which they contained, every word served but to irritate me, and to aggravate my grief. Cruel, cruel did it seem to me, to force the poor unhappy girl into an union from which her heart revolted, without giving her time even to prepare her mind by thought, or by contemplation to habituate her ideas to a change of situation and of duties which implied the sacrifice of her heart's first and strongest affection. Bitterly, in my own breast, did I upbraid Monsieur de Villardin for the haste with which he proceeded—bitterly also did I upbraid Father Ferdinand for not using all his influence to obtain, at least, a delay of some weeks or months.

From what had fallen from Monsieur de Villardin, when last I saw him, I had certainly anticipated that the marriage would take place much sooner than he had at first determined; but never did I think that only three short weeks would be allowed for Laura to cast me from her heart, and to summon resolution to plight her faith to another; and the agony of mind that I knew she would suffer, as may well be supposed, added not a little to my own. Often, often was I tempted to act now, as I most certainly should have acted in former years—to hasten to the Près Vallée, and exerting all the influence that I possessed over her mind, to persuade her to escape from the trammels which they sought to impose upon her, and uniting her fate to mine for ever, fly to some distant land, where we might spend the rest of our days in peace. But still a sense of honour and gratitude made me pause and doubt, till the fatal day at length arrived, and I saw the sun rise and set that was to seal my fate and hers for ever. As it sunk below the verge of the horizon, and the grey, deep night came on, the struggle between duty and passion was over, and nothing remained but despair. My heart was like a field of battle, from which a fierce and fearful strife had passed away, and had left behind nothing but mourning and death.

Shutting myself up in my own chamber, I cast myself down on my bed without undressing, and many an hour passed over my head, uncounted and unmarked, in a sort of dreary stupor, which was in everything the reverse of sleep; far from being a suspension of thought, it was the rushing of painful ideas through my brain, in such crowded multitudes, that all individual form and distinctness was lost. At length the faint grey light told me that it was dawn, and springing from my bed, with an impulse that I could not resist, I woke the groom, and told him to saddle me my stoutest horse, determined to seek the Près Vallée. "They are all gone by this time," I thought; "the house is lonely and desolate like my own heart, and I may at least be permitted to see the spot where last she trod."

In a few minutes the horse was at the door, and the servants, gazing anxiously upon me, asked whether they might not accompany me? I replied, somewhat harshly, "No," and springing into the saddle, shook my bridle-rein, and galloped off towards Rennes. My gallant horse, which had borne me through many a battle-field, now carried me stoutly on, and, as if he felt the same eagerness which swelled in my own heart, slackened not his pace for many a mile. As I rode through the forest, I heard some distant voices; but my heart and my brain were both too full for me to give any attention to external objects, and the sounds fell upon my ear heard, but not noticed. About six miles more brought me to the first woods of the Près Vallée, and in a few moments I was standing amongst the tall trees, and beside the lonely grave of turf, where Laura and myself had been accustomed to meet. I gazed sternly on the spot for a few moments, calling up all the memories which thronged around it, and torturing my own heart with every thought which could render my feelings more bitter. Tying my horse to a branch of a tree, I walked slowly on towards the house, expecting to find it nearly deserted; but I was surprised, when I approached the terrace, to see a number of grooms and servants, apparently busy in their usual occupations. The sight startled me, and drawing rapidly back, I escaped through the garden, in order to regain my horse without being seen; for unless the whole household had departed, to enter the Près Vallée at such a moment of course never crossed my thoughts.

I now passed quickly through the garden, and was turning towards the door at the other side, when I suddenly heard a low voice calling after me, "Hist—hist! Monsieur le Baron," and looking round, I beheld old Jerome, the major-domo, pursuing me as fast as his somewhat feeble limbs would permit. I turned towards him, and bade him follow to some place where we should not be observed; but he replied, "Oh, there is no fear here. They are all gone out, and will be too tired before their return to come walking in the garden."

There were a thousand questions that I could have wished to ask, but they died away upon my lips; and had not the old man been as eager to tell as I was to hear, I should have gained no tidings.

"You have heard the news, sir?" he said, "you have heard the news?"

"I have heard nothing, Jerome," I replied, "except that the family was to quit the Près Vallée yesterday, which is the sole cause of my being here to-day."

"Well, then, you have not heard,'" continued the old man, with a smile of evident satisfaction brightening up his features, "you have not heard that the marriage is delayed, and Lise declares she is sure it will not take place at all."

I thought I should have fallen down dead at his feet, so sudden was the change from despair to hope; and now, being more anxious than ever to hear him to an end uninterrupted, I beckoned him out of the gardens, and leading the way towards the grave of the Count de Mesnil, in which direction I knew Monsieur de Villardin would not venture, I besought him to tell me all that had occurred. He began his story with a long tirade against my rival, whose person and deportment seemed equally to have fallen under the old man's disapprobation. I cut short his details, however, concerning the Count de Laval, telling him that I knew him, and that he need not describe him; and he then went on to relate the events which had occurred within the last week.

"Just five days ago," he said, "when we all thought the marriage was to take place as yesterday, Mademoiselle—as many of us had fancied she would—fell ill, and several physicians were sent for from Rennes. The two who came, I hear from Lise, declared that she was ill in body because she was ill in mind; and that Monsieur de Villardin or Father Ferdinand must be her physicians, as they could do nothing for her. Both the Duke and the priest went to her immediately, and Lise was sent away, so that she heard nothing more. At length, however, it seems that she obtained permission to see the Count himself, and to tell him all she felt, for he was admitted to her chamber, and, while Lise stood at one end of the room, held a long conversation with our young lady at the other. What it was all about Lise did not hear, though she very well guessed; but as the Count was going away, he said aloud, 'As you desire it, madam, I will certainly speak with the good Father, though I do not think he can tell me anything which I do not know before. But, at all events, rest satisfied that, after the confidence you have placed in me, I will do nothing ungenerous.'

"From all this Lise augured well; but, what between agitation, and terror, and fatigue, my young lady fainted seven or eight times within the hour, after the Count had left her; and at length Lise was obliged to call the Duke and other people to her assistance, as she could not bring Mademoiselle to herself again; and for some time everyone thought she was dead. As soon as she had recovered, she was told that, at the desire of the Count himself, the marriage would be put off for a month; and from that moment she began to get better rapidly. The same evening, I saw the Count walking with Father Ferdinand for nearly three hours; and I always thought that news had been sent to you, for I know that a messenger was despatched that night to Dumont, without the knowledge of Monsieur de Villardin."

"He never came!" I exclaimed. "I never saw him! I never heard of his arrival!"

"That is very strange," said the old man, "for he certainly went, and as certainly returned early yesterday morning. However, yesterday, Mademoiselle was quite well again; but all the preparations for the marriage have been done away. The Count seems very respectful and kind to my young lady. Lise, who knows better about it than anyone, appears more happy, and everyone thinks that the marriage will not take place at all. To-day, all went out early, with the carriage and a few horsemen, but they have not returned yet, though Monseigneur said that he would be back before noon, and it is now nearly three o'clock."

The relief that all these tidings gave me was almost too great to bear with any degree of firmness. I could have wept for very joy; and yet, so strange, so unexpected, was the whole, that I scarcely dared suffer myself to entertain the hopes which good old Jerome was so anxious to supply. "The marriage," I thought, "might indeed be delayed; Laura's entreaties and illness might have obtained for her some compassion; but, if the character which I had heard of the Count de Laval were correct, he was not a man to yield easily the hand of the richest heiress in France, or to suffer what he would consider her childish passion for another ultimately to break through the positive engagements which her father had entered into with himself." Such thoughts, of course, tended to calm my joy, and to moderate my expectations; but still the flame of hope was again lighted in my bosom, and infinite, indeed, was the change which had taken place in all my feelings since I had left Dumont at break of day.

Numberless, however, were still the questions which I had to ask of the old man; for the slightest particular, the most accidental trait, in the events which had occurred, was of course calculated to raise up or cast down my new-found hopes, and was in itself interesting from its connection with the fate and happiness of Laura de Villardin. Thus, with slow and interrupted steps, we were proceeding in the direction which I have mentioned, sometimes pausing to ask a question or to receive a reply, sometimes stopping short to think over all I had heard, and to try to discover what was really the state of the case from the broken information which Jerome could alone afford me, when suddenly, a little way ere we reached the spot where I had left my charger, the sound of a horse's feet, coming rapidly down the neighbouring avenue, made me hasten behind some thick hawthorn bushes, to avoid observation. Jerome, however, remained where he was, and I could hear, from my place of concealment, the horse stop when it reached him, some hasty conversation take place, and then the voice of the old man calling me, for God's sake, to come up. I did so at once; and, as I emerged from the trees, was not a little surprised to perceive that the person conversing with the old major-domo was a woman dressed in the habit of a Bretonne paysanne, and mounted on a good horse, which she had not quitted, but was speaking as she sat, with all the eager gesticulation of passion and energy. The next moment she turned towards myself, and what was my astonishment as she did so, to behold Suzette, the former maid of Madame de Villardin, and the wife of Gaspard de Belleville.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

My surprise at beholding Suzette in a place where she knew that nothing but abhorrence and contempt would attend her, made me pause for a single instant; but she remarked the delay, and exclaimed loudly, "Why do you delay?—Quick! quick! if you are the man you used to be—quick! and save them; or you may come too late."

"Save whom?" I demanded, still more astonished. "What do you mean, Suzette? you look wild and haggard—what is it brings you here?"

"I am wild!" she answered, "I am haggard! and how can it be otherwise? I that have not closed an eye these seven nights, watching the machinations of two base villains, who, to revenge themselves on you and yours, would sacrifice me too; and leave me to die of grief and rage, so that they might enrich themselves with the spoils of those they hate! But I am babbling—if you love the Marquis de Villardin—if—if, John Hall, you love Laura de Villardin—as I know you do—for you have been watched under those trees many a day, when you knew not that anyone saw you—if you would save her from the shame of wedding that low slave Gaspard de Belleville——"

"Good God!" I cried, "you told me that you were yourself his wife."

"I did!—I did!"—she cried, "and so I am; but they have taken from me the proofs of my marriage—but mind not that! Hear me—his wife, indeed, she cannot be—but if you would save her from the shame of marrying him who has another wife still living—follow them, as rapidly as you can, to the forest—'tis but six miles. Take the road to St. Aubin—then choose the third wood track to the right—you will come to a stream—follow it till you reach the ruins of a water-mill. If you overtake them not before, you will find them at the little chapel under the rocks at the back of the mill. But call your men quickly, and spur as if for life, and you will reach them long ere that, for the carriage was dragging but slowly through the sandy ground. Have I directed you clearly? can you find the place?"

"I know it already!" I replied, "I know it already."

"Quick, quick, then!" she cried, "seek your followers, mount and begone!"

"I wait for none!" I answered; "you, Jerome, get every servant in the house on horseback, send one to Rennes for a troop of the guards, bring the rest up to the forest like lightning! Suzette, for your soul's peace, lead them direct to the spot—you will find me there living or dead—be quick, as you hope for salvation!"

"I *will* be quick, as I hope for vengeance!" cried Suzette, the deepest passion of her soul breaking forth. "Get you on first, then; you may stay them for a time! We will not be long after! Speed, speed!"

No time did I lose; my gallant horse stood ready at the foot of the trees not a quarter of a mile distant. The length of way that he had come had abated but little of his strength, and the short rest he had found had, in some degree, refreshed him; so that when once I was upon his back he needed neither whip nor spur. My shortest way was across the river, and dashing quick to the brink, I drew the pistols from the holsters to keep them from the water, and with a light touch of the heel made the horse plunge in. The stream, though deep, was slow, and the beast stemmed it gallantly, strained up the opposite bank, and reaching the road, bore me on towards the forest. It was no time to spare his speed, and I urged him on at the full gallop, looking eagerly towards the dark masses of trees that lay at the edge of the cultivated track before me, when suddenly the horse recoiled from some object lying on the road; and I found that though he had borne me amidst hundreds of dead and dying, yet he had drawn back from a single body lying across the road. It was that of one of Monsieur de Villardin's servants, and the attitude in which he lay, as well as the quantity of blood which stained the ground around him, showed plainly that the poor fellow was beyond all further care. Forcing the horse to pass, I galloped on, and soon after entered the wood. Never did I forget a road that once I had seen, and now, although the tidings of Suzette had been vague and confused, I advanced direct towards the scene of my former adventures with the robbers and their good captain, Hubert.

The wood track which conducted to the small stream was easily found, and riding on as fast as I could go, I soon reached the river. Here the first object that presented itself was the carriage of Monsieur de Villardin overturned in the deep sandy break of the banks that led to a little ford. The horses, however, had been taken off, and the carriage was left alone, so that it was evident that the accident must have happened some time before; but as I was now within a quarter of a mile of the mill, though it was concealed from my sight by the windings of the stream, I determined to dismount and pursue the rest of the way on foot, knowing that if my single hand could do any service to my poor Laura or her father, it would be by caution and surprise. Again fastening my horse to a tree and placing the pistols in my girdle, I hastened forward till I caught a sight of the mill; but although I could distinguish a number of horses standing tied together round the building, no human being was to be seen. Onward I went, however, well aware how much a desperate man may do against many, although he be single-handed; and I soon heard voices, apparently at a short distance through the wood, to the right. I had never seen the chapel of which Suzette had spoken; but taking the voices for my guide, I crept through the trees as quickly but as silently as possible, trying to repress the eager haste of my heart by remembering the absolute necessity of caution as well as determination.

A moment after, the voices sounded much nearer, and I caught a glance through the trees of the head and shoulders of an armed man standing with his back towards me, and apparently speaking vehemently to some other persons whom I could not see. Here I was tolerably well concealed by some low thick bushes, but the taller trees were unfortunately stripped of their leaves; and although at the distance of twenty yards farther forward there was another thick patch of brushwood, from behind which I could have seen everything that took place, yet the trunks of the oaks in the intervening space stood bare and separate. I determined, however, to cross the space at all risks; and, getting as far back as possible, I glided from tree to tree.

The whole eyes and ears of the party I had seen were otherwise occupied, and at length I found myself behind the bushes I had marked. I was now within twenty yards of the chapel of which Suzette had spoken, and from behind the brushwood I could behold the whole party I sought assembled in the little open space before it. Placed upon a high rocky bank, from which the chapel was partly excavated stood Monsieur de Villardin and the Count de Laval with their hands tied; and at the distance of a dozen paces appeared eight or nine musqueteers, with their arms grounded indeed, but evidently arrayed there with no very good intentions towards the prisoners. Within a yard of Monsieur de Villardin lay upon the ground three or four of his servants tied hand and foot, and two of them apparently severely wounded; but a little to the left of these again, so as to be in front of the chapel—which was open, as such buildings usually are—appeared a group of still greater interest. Within the chapel itself stood a priest with an open book in his hand, and before him were placed Laura de Villardin, dressed in her morning costume, and Hubert, whom I had already seen in so many capacities, habited in the full and splendid dress of an officer of the guards of the Prince de Condé. Supporting Laura, who otherwise would have sunk to the ground, appeared Gaspard de Belleville; and another armed man behind him again, made up the whole party.

At the moment I turned to observe them, Hubert was speaking vehemently to Laura, so that his words were perfectly audible. "Will you, or will you not, madam?" he exclaimed. "Seek not to gain time—for it is all in vain. No one can rescue you. And the lives of all those you see depend upon your word!"

"Let him do his worst, my child!" cried Monsieur de Villardin; "let him do his worst. It is better for us all to die together, than that you should become the wife of a villainous plunderer—though, indeed, no such forced marriage would be valid for an hour; and his first step would be from the altar to the gibbet."

"Your pardon, my lord," cried Hubert, with a smile of triumph, "I use no force—I use no compulsion towards the young lady herself; though, to be sure, I point out the only means of saving your life. Do not therefore flatter yourself that were she to consent, and I were to set you free, the scaffold would become my bridal bed. No, no, I have taken my measures too well for that; and when I come to claim your daughter's portion, it shall not be till she has been long my wife, and the mother of my children; and then we shall see whether you will hang her husband or not. Madame," he added, in a sterner tone, "Madame, time wears—I beseech you to spare your father's life. If you refuse me, his blood be upon your head—your own hand draws the trigger that slays him—your own voice pronounces the word. Nor will you then escape me; for you shall be mine by force if not by good-will. Speak!—shall I order yon men to fire?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Laura, clasping her hands in agony, "you will not be so cruel!"

"Will you then consent instantly to become my wife?" he demanded; but Laura turned her weeping eyes to the priest, exclaiming, "Oh, good Father, how can you lend yourself to such infamous things as these?"

"How can I help it, lady?" asked the priest: "I am as much under compulsion as you are."

"Another such word as that, old hypocrite," cried Gaspard de Belleville, "shall send the compulsion of a pistol ball through your brain You came here for gold, not for compulsion, so prepare to do your office. Come, come, Hubert, you do but dally; give her choice, and let her decide boldly. Bid the men present their firelocks, and then ask her the question. If she say '*Yes*,' let them ground their arms—if she say '*No*,' let it be the signal for them to fire; so her own voice will give the word."

"Ah, surely, surely!" cried Laura, clasping her fair hands, "surely you will not be so cruel!"

"You will soon see, madam," cried Hubert, turning towards his men. "You will soon see."

"Be firm, Laura! be firm!" shouted Monsieur de Villardin; "on your duty, on your honour, yield not a step!"

The moment was now come—I could wait for aid no longer; and I trusted that previous to my own death, which seemed inevitable, I should be able to give the villains sufficient occupation to enable Jerome and the rest to come up in time to save Laura and her father. Hubert turned towards his men; and I could see by the knitting of his brows, and the setting of his teeth, that his determination was taken. What Laura's final reply might be, of course I could not tell. I thought that sooner than see her father's blood spilt before her eyes, she would say, "Yes," at any risk. But I dared not trust to circumstances, and as the chief of the robbers was giving his orders to his men, and while Monsieur de Villardin was exhorting his daughter to die herself and see them all die sooner than yield to the degradation proposed, I drew a pistol from my belt, and gliding from behind the brushwood, was standing at Hubert's side ere anyone noticed me but Laura herself.

An exclamation of surprise, not unmingled with joy, broke from her lips; and the villain, startled by the sound, turned full round upon me. I paused not—I uttered not a word—but levelling the pistol at his head, pulled the trigger. The sharp, ringing report satisfied me that nothing had gone wrong, and scarcely pausing to see the dead man fall, I threw away the discharged weapon, caught the other from my belt, and, with one spring forward, seized Gaspard de Belleville by the collar and put the pistol to his ear. Thinking that his death would be immediate, he crouched down in terror; but I had other views, and seeing all the musketeers presenting their weapons towards me, I exclaimed aloud, as if I had been giving the word of command to my own troop, "Ground your arms!"

The effect was electric. Every musket was grounded at once, and at the same moment the jingling sound of bridles and stirrups coming up at the full gallop struck my ear, and was certainly the gladdest sound I had heard for many a long day.

The robbers caught it too, and easily divining what it meant, I could see them waiver with the uncertainty of surprise. The man, however, who stood behind Gaspard de Belleville, set the example of flight, and plunged into the brushwood which had served me as a place of concealment. The others paused a moment, but the sounds of approaching horsemen becoming louder and louder, determined them to fly, and passing round on the other side of the chapel, they were for a moment lost to my sight. One of them, indeed, before he went, twice raised his musket to his shoulder and took aim at me, as I stood grasping the collar of Gaspard de Belleville, but each time he again withdrew his piece, and then ran after the rest as fast as he could go. Anxious to liberate Monsieur de Villardin and his servants, and yet not able to effect it myself, I besought Laura, and commanded the priest, to untie their hands, and both immediately turned to do so.

Ere she had taken a step, Laura, overcome by a variety of mingled emotions which may well be conceived, fainted away, and fell across the step of the chapel. The priest, however, ran forward and slipped the knot from the hands of Monsieur de Villardin; but just as he had done so, and while he was proceeding to execute the same good office in favour of the rest, the marauders, who had been met, in their attempt to escape, by a party of the guards, were driven back into the open space before the chapel, while a large body of Monsieur de Villardin's servants, guided by Suzette, came round by the path which I had followed. The guards from Rennes appeared on the other side at nearly the same moment, and finding themselves hemmed in, the robbers, who were most of them old soldiers, stood to their arms, and showed their determination to sell their lives dearly. Facing about at the chapel, they received the guards, who pursued them closely, with a steady fire. A number of the horses went over; all became hurry and confusion; and fearful that the marauders would be driven back over my poor Laura, I thrust Gaspard de Belleville into the hands of some of the servants, and ordering him to be tied tightly, hand and foot, rushed forward to extricate her.

The guards had, by this time, betaken themselves to their fire-arms, with very little discrimination between friends and enemies; shots were flying in every direction; and through the smoke which now gathered quickly round us, I saw Suzette, who had guided the servants, fall at the feet of her dastardly husband. Monsieur de Villardin, as soon as he found himself at liberty, had snatched the sword of Hubert from its sheath, and, like myself, was rushing on towards the spot where Laura lay. But at that moment the marauders gave the guards another volley, and while a ball grazed my cheek and struck off my hat, Monsieur de Villardin fell with his face to the ground. Waving the guards and servants up to close with our adversaries, I cut down one of the men who was again charging his musket; the soldiers rushed on, and the little phalanx of marauders was broken, but not conquered, for each individual fought to the last with desperate courage.

It was with difficulty that I carried Laura out of the *mêlée*, terrified every moment that some random shot might strike her as I bore her in my arms. The Count de Laval was by this time unbound, and rushing up to the affray; but as he was unarmed, I gave Laura over to his care, though I could scarcely even now master my repugnance to see him render her the slightest assistance. Whether he remembered me or not, I cannot tell; but he exclaimed, as he saw me turning back towards the strife that was going on, "Nay, nay, sir, you have had enough for one day; you take care of the lady; let me have my share."

"You are unarmed, sir, you are unarmed," I replied, "and only risking your life for no purpose. Carry her behind the turn of the rock, and guard her there from danger, for God's sake!"

Without farther words, I hurried back as fast as possible, and forcing my way in amongst the combatants, reached the spot where Monsieur de Villardin had fallen. I found him raising himself upon his arm, and lifting him up, I gazed upon his face to judge whether the wound he had received were dangerous. He recognised me instantly, and the first words he said were, "My gallant boy! my gallant boy! must I always owe you everything!"

"Laura is safe," I replied; "let me carry you to her;" and raising him in my arms, I bore him round the turn of the road, where I found the Count and several of the unarmed servants endeavouring to recall Laura to herself. Placing Monsieur de Villardin on the bank, our whole cares were now directed towards him, as he was bleeding freely from a wound in his right breast; and every now and then, with a slight cough, his mouth was filled with blood, so that I could not doubt that the shot had passed through his lungs. The external bleeding we soon contrived to stop, and beseeching him not to speak at all, I went back to the scene of conflict to ascertain whether it were yet concluded. I found that it was so, and that the guards were standing round the two prisoners they had taken, conversing with all sorts of hurried exclamations over the events which had just occurred.

"There are a number of wounded men here, gentlemen," I said, "who are in need of immediate assistance. Let us ascertain the state of the field, and we will talk of all the rest afterwards."

"And pray, sir, who are you?" demanded the inferior officer who commanded the party of guards; "you may be one of these marauders also, for aught I know."

"I am the Baron de Juvigny, sir," I replied, "Colonel of his most Christian Majesty's —— regiment of horse, and bearing the rank of Major-General in the service. You will therefore have the goodness to draw up your men, and assist me in examining into the state of the wounded."

The young officer immediately obeyed; and we found that six of the guards, three of the servants, and nine of the marauders, were either dead or wounded. Only two prisoners, as I have said, were made besides Gaspard de Belleville, who, for his part, stood with his arms tied behind him, glaring sullenly upon the form of Suzette, who was lying weltering in her blood, which not all the efforts of good old Jerome seemed to have the slightest effect in staunching. Many a muttered reproach, too, was her brutal husband pouring upon her head for having betrayed him and his companions; and as I came up, she replied feebly, "It was your own fault. I could have put up with your cruelty. You might have turned plunderer or marauder without my opposing you; but when you sought to marry another woman, while I was still living, you did that which is not to be forgiven."

"Fool!" cried the brute, in reply, "I sought to marry no other woman. It was your brother! He whom you have murdered by bringing that infernal English fiend upon us—he it was who was to have married her. It was his fortune I sought to make, while I avenged myself at once upon the man who has marred mine through life, who has met me and thwarted me at every turn, and upon the old dotard who has lent his aid to crush me, and to raise yon worm from the dunghill. It was your own mad, wild folly that made you think that I wanted to marry her!"

"Then why did you take from me the proofs of our marriage?" said Suzette. "Why did you leave me at St. Aubin, and not let me know where you were going?"

As such recriminations were not at all likely to do any service to the poor wretch Suzette, I ordered Gaspard de Belleville to be removed to a distance from his wife, and his person to be searched in order to discover, if possible, all the particulars of the unfortunate affair which had just taken place. I then turned to give directions for bringing up litters and other conveyances to carry away the wounded, with as little inconvenience to themselves as possible; but at that moment, I was joined by the Count de Laval, who grasped my hand, with greater signs of friendship than I could find it in my heart to return.

"Monsieur de Juvigny," he said, "you will be glad to hear that Monsieur de Villardin seems better, and that the bleeding internally as well as externally seems entirely to have ceased. Mademoiselle de Villardin also has recovered, and wishes to see you. Let me beg you to accompany me."

"I follow you, sir," I replied: and, still holding my hand in his, with a smile upon his lip that I neither liked nor understood, he led me back to the spot where I had left Laura and Monsieur de Villardin. The Duke was seated on the bank, pale, but apparently not so much injured as I had imagined. Laura, leaning beside him, held one of his hands in hers, and gazed anxiously on his face. She, too, was very pale; but, as I came forward, with the Count still holding my hand, a bright blush spread itself over her countenance.

"Mademoiselle de Villardin," said the Count, "here is your young friend come in person to show you that he is unhurt; and let us all together offer him our thanks for the important service that he has rendered us——" He paused a single instant, and then added, "Monsieur de Villardin, believing it to be impossible that any young lady can have been brought up from infancy with so worthy a gentleman, without having felt for him affections that ought not to be disappointed, and being myself the last man to take advantage of accidental circumstances to seek my own happiness at the expense of others, allow me to propose that all engagements between you and me should be considered as henceforth null and void; and, if you will follow my counsel, you will join these two hands for ever with your blessing:" and, as he spoke, he placed that of Laura in mine.

Monsieur de Villardin did not venture to reply; but, while Laura, with a burning cheek and glittering eyes, gazed earnestly upon his face, he laid his hand upon ours, as they were clasped together, with a gentle pressure which was quite confirmation enough. Laura spoke not, and my heart was too full to permit the use of words. The silence became embarrassing to all parties; and the very intense happiness that thrilled through my heart showed me, for the first time in life, that joy can reach such a height as to be, in some degree, even painful.

We were relieved by the approach of the young officer, who had commanded the guards; and who now came to report that, as soon as the litters arrived, everything was prepared for our return to the Près Vallée. He would have the honour of escorting us thither, he said; and, in the meantime, he gave into my hands the only paper which had been found upon Gaspard de Belleville. It proved to be a written agreement between that scoundrel and a person calling himself Hubert Hubert, by which the worthy captain stipulated that, when, by the means and with the assistance of Gaspard de Belleville, he should have obtained possession of the person of Mademoiselle de Villardin, and married her, he would make over to the said Gaspard one half of whatever portion or dowry he might force Monsieur de Villardin, at any after period, to bestow upon his daughter. It was also expressly stipulated, that Hubert was to carry his bride to the Colonies, for the space of one year; and that he was likewise to provide a passage for Gaspard de Belleville and his wife; with various other articles of the same kind, all showing that the villains had calculated upon Monsieur de Villardin's making up his mind, at the end of a certain period, to recognise the marriage, however informal in law, and to receive the daring villain who had accomplished it, as his son-in-law.

A number of letters and papers, however, which were found upon the body of Hubert, clearly proved that the scheme had not been laid by him, but had been suggested by Gaspard de Belleville; and it was very evident, from every circumstance connected with the whole affair, that the desire of vengeance, both upon myself and upon Monsieur de Villardin, had taken fully as much part as rapacity, in the whole design. That Gaspard de Belleville and his ruffian brother-in-law had been lingering about in the neighbourhood of the Près Vallée, for many weeks, was clear, both from the circumstances which I had observed on the night before my departure for Dumont, and from the fact of Suzette having informed me that I and Laura had been watched for many a day, in our morning meetings at the grave of Monsieur de Mesnil; and thus it was, in all probability, that Gaspard de Belleville had learned the means by which he could most bitterly wring my heart, as well as that of Monsieur de Villardin. The villains had been caught in their own scheme, it is true; but a sad number of innocent persons had suffered as well as themselves.

To me, on the contrary,—as soon as I began to entertain hopes that the wound of Monsieur de Villardin would not prove of a serious nature,—the whole seemed to promise unequalled joy: and, as I sat upon the bank beside Laura, speaking, every now and then, a few words of hope and affection to her; and conversing more frequently with the Count, who now took upon himself the arrangements of all our after-proceedings; I fondly fancied that every difficulty was overcome, that every danger was averted, and that the whole current of my days was thenceforth to flow on in peace and happiness.

Whoever entertains such a dream will have to drink the bitter cup of disappointment; but still the vision, though it last but for an hour, is the brightest thing that imagination, amongst all its pageants, can conjure up. In this state passed nearly an hour and a half: but, at the end of that time, the tidings having been spread by Jerome's first messenger to Rennes, and the rumour having found its way—by all the thousand invincible channels which convey reports about the world—to half-a-dozen different places in the neighbourhood of the forest, litters, and carts, and horsemen, and pedestrians, began to arrive; and, placing our wounded in various conveyances, we commenced our march in long and slow procession once more towards the Près Vallée.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The day was just at its close as we issued forth from the forest, and took our way towards the bridge which crossed the river. I followed the procession on horseback amongst the last; and the whole scene, associated as it was with many deep interests and strange memories, was one of the most beautiful and extraordinary that ever my eye beheld. It was a splendid autumn evening, with the sun pouring its setting beams from the west, amidst scattered clouds tinged with every glorious colour that the mind can conceive. The long line of litters, and carriages, and horsemen, and foot, was winding slowly down the slope, which led from the edge of the wood towards the stream; and far and wide beneath my eyes—with every undulation marked by its own peculiar shade, and every building or group of trees casting long purple shadows as they cut off the rays of the declining sun—lay the rich wide lands of Brittany; while round about me, dark and heavy with the evening twilight, rose the broken masses of wood, with the thousands of wild banks and thorny dingles, which skirted the verge of the forest. The peculiar rich light of the hour too, spread over all the scene; and, catching here and there upon the bright arms and gay dresses of the soldiers and the servants, marked the different points in the procession: while every now and then, even in the more distant prospect, it touched some glistening object, and made it start forth, like a diamond, from the dark lines of planting or the grey slopes of the hills, not unlike one of those bright goals which youth fixes for its endeavours through life, as it stands upon the verge of manhood, and contemplates the distant future, while imagination flashes brilliantly on the object of desire, and lends it a lustre not its own. There was a fascination in the moment, and the scene, and the feelings of my own heart, not to be resisted; and I reined in my horse, for a single instant, to gaze upon the prospect, and then followed on, thinking, that if the beauties of nature be a substantial blessing to man, how much does his appreciation of them depend upon the state of his own bosom. A few hours before, I might have ridden through Tempe at daybreak, without noting that there was anything lovely before my eyes; and now, I could not have passed a quiet dell, or a bubbling brook, without feeling that the whole world is beautiful.

I had lingered a while behind the rest in order to hear the report of a party which had been sent to examine the mill, at which I doubted not that Hubert and his companions had established their chief rendezvous: but nothing was found there which could lead to any further discovery; and, as soon as the other horsemen overtook me, I rode on; and, easily passing the rest of the cavalcade, acted as their harbinger at the Près Vallée. I found Father Ferdinand in no small agitation; but before giving him any particulars of the events which had occurred, I despatched messengers to Rennes for every sort of medical assistance, and then relieved more fully the good Father's anxiety concerning Monsieur de Villardin and Laura.

"Are you sure, are you sure, that he is not much hurt?" he asked eagerly, referring to Monsieur de Villardin.

"The wound certainly, at first, appeared a very serious one," I replied; "but by the speedy cessation of the hemorrhage, and the want of that great weakness which I have generally seen follow very dangerous wounds, I trust there is nothing to be apprehended."

"God grant it!" replied the priest, "God grant it!" and after gazing upon me for a moment or two, he added, "and what is to become of you, my son?"

I understood the meaning of his question fully, and replied, "As far as I have been enabled to judge, good Father, there exists no further necessity for absenting myself. The Count de Laval resigns all claim to the hand of Mademoiselle de Villardin, and the Duke does not show any desire to bid me return to Dumont. But—ere we are interrupted—I hear from good old Jerome, that you despatched a messenger to me some days since. He never reached me."

"No, no!" cried Father Ferdinand hastily. "No, no.—It is a mistake. I despatched no messenger to you, my son. But, hark! I think I hear the horses' feet," and he turned to the window to look out.

He was mistaken however; and some minutes more elapsed before the cavalcade made its appearance. Our first care was, of course, of Monsieur de Villardin; but though he spoke only a few words, in an under voice, for fear of irritating the wound in his breast, and consented immediately to go to bed, yet he walked up the stairs with so much strength, that our apprehensions on his account were nearly done away.

The servants and soldiers who had been wounded, were disposed of in various parts of the building; and I aided in carrying the unhappy Suzette to a chamber on the ground floor, as she seemed to suffer so greatly from the slightest motion that we feared to convey her to a more convenient apartment. As soon as we had laid her upon her couch, I was turning to give what assistance I could in the other arrangements, but she beckoned me eagerly back, saying, in a low husky voice, "I would speak with you, sir! I would speak with you alone!"

She was evidently dying, and of course her request was not to be refused. Desiring the servants, therefore, to attend to the safe keeping of Gaspard de Belleville, I bade them leave me; and, closing the door, approached the bedside of the unhappy woman, whose moments in this life were waxing few.

"Monsieur de Juvigny," she said, in a voice so faint and inarticulate, that it required great attention to catch the meaning of her words; "Monsieur de Juvigny—I would fain tell you something which may be of service both to you and to the Duke.—Do you remember when I told you my history once before, I said I had a third motive for bidding you repeat it to Monsieur de Villardin?"

"Well—very well!" I replied; "but, my good Suzette, be as brief as possible; for you are wasting your strength, and you may yet need all you have left."

"You need not hear me, unless you please," she answered peevishly, and then continued in the same low and irregular voice, "Well, I was saying, that I had a third motive—it was this, that I knew something that no one else knew; and I knew it, because, after I was sent away from Dumont, I lodged for some time in the house of old Madame——"

I lost the name, and her voice became more and more indistinct, but still she went on:—"She used to attend sick people, you know, at Estienne; and though she had been sworn to secrecy, yet——"

But her words became quite unintelligible; and perceiving that I did not understand her, she paused, and gazed in my face with a painful stare of anger and disappointment, as if my want of attention had been the cause of my not comprehending what she said. I saw that death was approaching fast, and I asked, in charity, "Would you wish to see your husband, Suzette?"

She made an effort to raise herself upon her arm, as she exclaimed distinctly, "I hate him!" but immediately sunk back upon the pillow. In answer to another question as to whether she would wish to see a minister of religion, she raised her hand, and bowed her head, in token of acquiescence; and, rising, I proceeded to seek for Father Ferdinand.

I was told that he was in the chamber of Monsieur de Villardin, with Laura and old Jerome Laborde; and, taking the liberty which had always been granted me of entering the Duke's apartments in the hours of sickness, I proceeded immediately thither, in search of the good confessor.

Father Ferdinand was engaged in writing a paper for Monsieur de Villardin, who, as I entered, held up his finger to me to keep silence till it was completed, which was not long in being done. The Duke then read it over attentively, and, turning slightly in his bed, affixed his signature to it. The Count de Laval, who was also in the room, next advanced and took the pen; and I could see the eyes of Laura, who was sitting by her father's pillow, glance from him to me, beaming up as they did so, with a look full of affection and hope. When the Count had signed it, Laura also put her name; and Jerome and Father Ferdinand added their own, as witnesses.

"Monsieur de Juvigny," said Monsieur de Villardin, speaking in a low voice, which was evidently modulated from caution more than from weakness, "what were you going to say?"

"I was merely about to tell Father Ferdinand," I replied, "that that unhappy woman, Suzette, is below, dying, and that she requires the aid of the Church, with speed."

Father Ferdinand instantly rose to seek her; but Monsieur de Villardin made a sign to him to pause for a moment; and, beckoning me closer to him, he gave me the paper which he had just signed. "Although I believe that I have been much nearer death than I am at present," he said, "yet as all wounds such as I have received are uncertain in their consequences, I have thought fit, my dear boy, as far as possible, to put your happiness, and that of my dear Laura, beyond further doubt. If I survive, I myself will join your hands; if not, that paper will remove all difficulty on the part of others. Nay, do not thank *me*, De Juvigny: Monsieur le Comte here has behaved most nobly, and requires the gratitude of all; but I have only acted now as I should have acted long ago. Now, my dear sir," he added, speaking to the confessor, "seek the poor creature who desires your presence. Perhaps when the surgeons arrive, I may wish you and De Juvigny to be with me also; but in the meantime I would willingly pass half an hour alone. Nay, leave me, dear Laura, and look not sad. Things will go well, I am sure."

We all, accordingly, left the room. Father Ferdinand betook himself to the bedside of Suzette. The emotions in the bosom of Laura, both pleasurable and painful, were too many and too mixed to admit of words, and she immediately retired to her chamber; while old Jerome proceeded to bustle about in discharge of the various functions of his office, so that the moment after we had left Monsieur de Villardin, the Count and myself were left alone. My feelings towards him at that instant would not be very easily defined even now; nor did I very well know how to demean myself towards him, so as to express my sense of his noble and feeling conduct, without abating my own dignity.

"Monsieur le Comte," I said, after some slight hesitation, "you have acted nobly and generously towards me, and, therefore, I have to return you my thanks, which I do most sincerely, for pursuing a line of conduct that, doubtless, was the best calculated to promote your own happiness also, but which, most certainly, has ensured and restored mine."

"You owe me no thanks, Monsieur de Juvigny," he replied; "having had few opportunities of cultivating the pleasure of your acquaintance, I cannot be supposed to have been actuated by any feeling of personal interest towards you. The fact is, that Mademoiselle de Villardin, some days ago, gave me to understand that her affections were irrevocably bestowed upon another; and, however highly I might esteem the honour of Monsieur de Villardin's alliance, of course I did not covet the hand of a young lady, whose heart, I clearly saw, I could never hope to possess. Other circumstances combined, I acknowledge, to fix my determination; but once having resolved upon resigning all claim to the honour intended for me, I saw no reason why I should not do my best to make her happy, who had frankly informed me that she could never make me so. Thus you see that you have no cause to thank me, though I do not deny that it gives me great pleasure to serve a gentleman every way so deserving as yourself."

This was spoken in that calm, polite, ceremonious sort of tone, which put all feeling out of the question, and which seemed perfectly intended to stop everything like an expression of gratitude. Such being the case, I, of course, said no more upon the subject, and the Count at once turned the conversation to the events which had lately occurred.

"It seems to me evident, Monsieur de Juvigny," he said, "from all I have been enabled to gather, that this attack upon our party has been long concerted, and that nothing has prevented its execution before but want of opportunity. I am curious, however, I acknowledge, to ascertain how such a scheme could be long carried on without being divulged by some accident or other. These people, it is evident, must have watched us for some time, and must also have been very thoroughly acquainted with all that was passing here."

"I doubt not that they were, my lord," I replied; "but in regard to their schemes not having been discovered, you are, in some degree, mistaken; for the night previous to my departure from this place, about three weeks or a month ago, I myself observed two men examining the château, late at night, and heard a part of their conversation, which, though it certainly did not afford me any accurate information, at all events served to show me that some evil design was in progress. With these facts I made Monsieur de Villardin acquainted; but it appears that, confiding in the number of his attendants, he did not take the necessary precautions."

"It seems," replied the Count, with a smile that I did not particularly like, "it seems that you were more watchful over our safety. Nay, do not look offended, Monsieur de Juvigny; I mean nothing that should in the least hurt you, thinking it very natural that a young lover should hover round his mistress, although he might think that she was lost to him for ever."

"At all events, Monsieur le Comte, your conclusion is, I can assure you, wrong. The fact is, that I received information some time ago from Monsieur de Villardin himself, purporting that the marriage of his daughter was to take place yesterday, and that he himself, with all his family, were to set out immediately for Paris. Concluding that this was the case, I felt myself at liberty to return to scenes that were dear to me; and on my arrival, was met by the woman who informed me of your situation, and directed me to the spot where you had been carried. I am still, however, ignorant of all the events which preceded my finding you in the forest, and I would fain ask a detail of them, were it not trespassing too greatly on your time."

"Oh! the whole business is very soon related," replied he. "Mademoiselle de Villardin being so much better, and able to take the air, her father determined to accompany her in the carriage, while I, with four servants, escorted them on horseback. After passing the bridge at—I forget the name of the place—we went on for about a mile or a mile and a half towards the forest, intending to turn back ere we reached it, when suddenly, as we were passing between two hedges, we were saluted by a volley of musketry, which instantly brought three of the servants to the ground, and wounded my horse so severely as to make him fall with me. At the same time the carriage was surrounded, Monsieur de Villardin seized and tied before he could make any resistance, and I, sharing the same fate, was placed beside him and Mademoiselle in the carriage. The ruffian you shot, and his companion, as well as another personage of the same stamp, took their places beside us. Two of the servants who were wounded, as well as the rest who were made prisoners, were forced to sit on their horses, and follow the rest; and we were soon carried off into the heart of the wood, leaving none but one of the poor fellows, who had been killed upon the spot, behind us. All this occupied a considerable time, and I was in hopes every moment that someone, attracted by the sound of musketry, might come up, and at least carry the news to the town. But in this wild province one might as well be in a desert. No one appeared, and we were dragged on into the wood, without the slightest power of resistance. Luckily, however, the road was so bad and sandy, that we made but slow progress; and at length, as good fortune would have it, just as we were going to cross the stream, the carriage was overturned, and stuck immovable in the sand. You may easily imagine that we afforded no great assistance to our conductors, and did not make our movements any quicker than we were compelled to do. Thus at least half an hour was consumed in endeavouring to move the carriage, and in getting us out of it. We were then forced to walk forwards for a considerable distance to an old mill, which seemed at some former period to have been destroyed by fire; and here, all our horses having been tied to the building, we were again marched forward to the little chapel where you found us, and where we were received by another of the band, who seemed to have a priest in his custody, though, I must confess, the worthy clerk did not appear to be under any very great restraint. I had remarked, as we went along, that one of the leaders of our assailants had paid considerable attention to Mademoiselle de Villardin; and had also learned, from some words that Monsieur de Villardin let fall,—though they took care, with pistols at our throats, to keep us from much conversation,—that the other personage, who seemed to take a lead amongst them, had formerly been a page in this family. I was thus the less surprised when, on reaching the chapel, the former coolly proposed to Mademoiselle de Villardin to become his wife; and, as a sort of mild inducement, informed her that, unless she instantly consented, he would shoot her father, myself, and all the other prisoners before her eyes. Of course a considerable discussion took place upon this point, which was cut short by your punishing the villain as he deserved; and with everything else that occurred, you are, perhaps, better acquainted than I am."

"The only matter that I do not know," I replied, "and which I had forgotten till this moment, is the fate of the priest, whom I do not remember to have seen after the beginning of the affray."

"Oh! I marked him well," replied the Count. "He slipped away into the wood as fast as possible, and as his clerical dress probably saved him from interruption on the part either of the servants or the soldiers, he was, no doubt, soon far enough from the scene of conflict."

The arrival of the surgeons at this moment interrupted our further conversation; and, according to the desire which Monsieur de Villardin had expressed, I proceeded to the chamber where I had left Suzette, in order to call Father Ferdinand to accompany the medical men to the Duke's chamber. Knowing that the unhappy woman, even before I left her, had been incapable of making confession, except by signs, I did not hesitate to open the door, and I found the good priest still standing by her bedside, but no longer engaged in offering the consolations of religion, which now could have fallen alone upon the deaf ear of the dead.

"It is all over, my son," he said, as he saw me. "Have the surgeons arrived?"

I replied that they had, and he immediately followed me to the saloon where I had left them, whence we again proceeded to the chamber of Monsieur de Villardin. We found him perfectly composed, and willing to submit to anything that the medical men might think proper. But, after examining the wound, questioning their patient, and consulting long amongst themselves, the surgeons judged it not expedient even to attempt the extraction of the ball; but applied themselves, as far as possible, to prevent any fever ensuing from the wound, and determined to leave nature herself to do what she could to relieve their patient, before they endeavoured to assist her by the resources of art. When they had done everything that they thought fit, they left one of their number in the chamber of the Duke, to watch every turn in his case; and then, accompanied by the confessor and myself, proceeded to visit the servants and soldiers who had been wounded. As we went, Father Ferdinand, I remarked, anxiously questioned the principal surgeon upon the state of Monsieur de Villardin, and as to whether there existed even a chance of immediate danger. The surgeon replied, that he saw none whatever. The hemorrhage, he said, having spontaneously ceased, showed that no great blood-vessel had been injured, and that all that was now to be feared was subsequent inflammation taking place amongst some of the most delicate organs of the human frame. Satisfied with this assurance, Father Ferdinand only requested that immediate information might be given to him on the first appearance of any dangerous symptom, reminding the surgeon that, as Monsieur de Villardin's confessor, he had very important duties to perform towards him, as soon as it was ascertained that he was in perilous circumstances. "I need not tell you, sir," he added, "that, with a man of Monsieur de Villardin's nerve, the knowledge that he is in danger would in no degree tend to impede his recovery."

The surgeon promised to give him timely notice; and, on visiting the other wounded persons, we found that only one was beyond hope, while all the rest bade fair for a speedy recovery. It may as well be mentioned here, that they all did recover but one, who—as well as the servant I had seen lying on the road, and another who had been killed in our conflict with the robbers—was buried a few days after, together with Suzette, in the chapel of the château.

The party of the guards from Rennes, who had arrived so promptly to our aid, remained at the Près Vallée all night; and, as it was late before all the events which I have mentioned had taken place, I sent up old Jerome Laborde to Laura's apartments to know whether she thought fit to come down to the supper-table. She declined, however, as I had expected; and as Father Ferdinand also retired to his own chamber, indisposed by all the scenes which he had just gone through to partake in anything like mirth or festivity, I was obliged to do the honours of Monsieur de Villardin's table to the Count de Laval and the commander of the guards from Rennes, though I would much rather have been permitted, in silence and solitude, to think over all the events that had occurred, and to offer up my thanks to Heaven for the change from the deepest misery to a state of happiness, which my bitter repinings, under a temporary affliction, had, I confess, but little deserved. The young officer, with all the thoughtless gaiety of his age and his profession, drank deep and sat long, and might, indeed, have continued his carousings to a much later hour, if the Count, who, for a time, had been amused with his liveliness, at length getting tired, had not risen unceremoniously, and wished him good night. The young officer looked at me with a wistful glance, to see whether there was any chance of prolonging his potations with me; but my glass, which had long been vacant, gave him a sufficient reply, and, drinking one deep draught to our good repose, he once more visited his troop, and then betook himself to rest.

As all was now becoming quiet in the château, and, one after another, its different inhabitants were dropping off to their beds, I sought out my old friend Lise, and charged her with a message to her mistress, expressing a hope that I might have an interview with her the next day. Lise gave me, with a smile, the certain assurance of my request being complied with,—especially, she said, as she herself intended to go to Rennes, and her mistress would want some companion who knew how to take care of her. She was going on in the same strain, with a good deal of harmless conceit borne lightly forth to her tongue, on the full current of joy,—the floodgates of which had been opened in her heart by all the news she had received from her mistress—but some persons passing to their beds interrupted our conversation, and I proceeded once more to the apartments of Monsieur de Villardin. By means of his antechamber and dressing-room, I was enabled to enter without disturbing him; and, sitting quietly down by the surgeon, I remained the greater part of the night, anxious to see how it passed with his patient. At first he was somewhat restless, but towards morning he fell into a tranquil sleep; and, auguring better from all I now saw, than I had before fully permitted myself to hope, I left his apartments at about three o'clock, and retired to rest.

CHAPTER XL.

THE fatigue which I had endured throughout the preceding day had been unfelt during the time that I passed in active exertion; but the moment my head touched the pillow an overpowering sense of drowsiness fell upon me; and without any of that consciousness of falling asleep—which has, perhaps, something awful in it, from the sensible relinquishment of intelligent existence—I passed into a state of utter forgetfulness, which lasted between seven and eight hours. On waking I felt that I had slept long; and dressing myself as fast as possible, I hurried down to the saloon, in which, as a sort of rallying point for the whole household, I was sure to find someone. My delight may be supposed, when the one that I did find was my own beloved Laura. To bound forward towards me, as she had done from infancy, was her first emotion, and to it she yielded without fear, feeling, as I, too, felt, that the pain and the apprehension which for many a day had hung upon our morning meetings, were now cleared away, like clouds from the sun, and that all was happiness.

"You have slept long, De Juvigny," she said, looking up in my face with a smile; "you have slept long, and you look happy!"

"I have slept long and deeply, my beloved," I replied; "but remember, that for the last eight nights I have hardly known what sleep is."

The tears rose in Laura's eyes; but those tears that spring, in moments of joy, from the recollection of past sorrows, are not amongst the least sweet things of life. "I wish, De Juvigny," she replied, "I wish that all the hours of sleep which, during these eight days, fled from my pillow also, could have gone and rested upon yours. But little repose, indeed, have I known myself; and of course my thoughts, through those long tedious nights, were not rendered less sorrowful by thinking of all that you were suffering at the same time. But let us not remember anything unhappy now. My father has passed a very tranquil night, and the surgeon assures me that there is but little chance of his wound proving dangerous."

"Is Monsieur de Villardin awake, then?" I demanded.

"He has been so for some time," she answered, "and is now sitting up speaking with the Count, who, finding my father so much better, has determined to set out to-day for Paris, glad to leave our dear Brittany, and what he calls its semi-barbarous inhabitants—and our gloomy château—and poor Laura de Villardin—and to betake himself to courts and cities, and scenes and people much better fitted to him than any he has met with here."

She spoke with all the playful gaiety of former days; but I knew my dear Laura too well to believe that she would even have jested in regard to a man who had behaved so generously as I believed the Count to have done, had she not known some trait in his character which might detract a little from the apparent liberality of his conduct. She felt sorry, however, even for the slight touch of bitterness that had mingled with her words, almost as soon as they were spoken; and added, "It is very wrong of me, I believe, to feel so glad of the departure of a man who has behaved so kindly to us; and who, with the power, and, perhaps, with some inducements to make us very miserable, has, on the contrary, made us very happy; but I cannot help it, De Juvigny; and the very feelings which I detect in my own heart now, make me tremble to think what would have been those I should have experienced, had I been forced to marry a man I could not love. But go now to my father, who is anxious to see you too; and your presence will probably break off his conversation with the Count, which I am sure has continued too long for his health already."

I lingered a moment or two more, and then proceeded to the apartments of Monsieur de Villardin, where I found the Count in the act of taking his leave. Father Ferdinand, also, was present; but as the good priest remained with the Duke, I was commissioned to do all due honours to the departing guest, and it would be vain to deny that I felt the same satisfaction on seeing him enter his carriage, and quit the Près Vallée, that Laura had so artlessly expressed. I was about to seek another moment of happiness with Laura ere I returned to the chamber of her father, when the young commander of the guards stepped up to me and begged a few minutes' conversation. Of course I could not refuse; and taking him into the library as the nearest vacant apartment, I requested him to state his commands.

"Why, the truth is, Monsieur le Baron," he said, with a somewhat rueful air—"the truth is, one of our prisoners has contrived to slip through our fingers."

"Which? Which? Not the one I myself made?" I cried—fearing that it might be Gaspard de Belleville, and feeling now convinced, from all that had happened during the last ten years, that it was not quite so necessary, or so indifferent, to have even one bitter enemy loose in the same world with us, as I had once thought it—"Not the one I made myself, surely?"

"The very same," answered the young officer. "However, I trust there is no great harm done; for it matters little which way such a fellow meets his death. If he had been taken alive to Rennes, he would have been hung, of course, and now he has but broken his neck. So it makes little difference."

"Broken his neck!" I exclaimed. "Explain! explain! my good sir!"

"Yes!" he answered, "he has simply broken his neck. The fact was, you were all so busy last night, and so much occupied with Monsieur de Villardin and Mademoiselle, that we were obliged to dispose of him as well as we could; and therefore, as the safest place, we put him up in the small room at the top of the west tower. There is a buttress, you know, runs down the side just between the windows, with a sort of steps upon it as it grows thicker; and it would seem that by this means he fancied he could make his escape. He must have fallen, however, in trying to reach the buttress, for his body was found quite dead, and cold, almost exactly beneath the window of the chamber in which he was confined."

I remembered, as he spoke, having in boyhood performed, as a feat, the descent from that very window, while Gaspard de Belleville had stood by and looked on, declaring that nothing was so easy, and that anyone could do it if they took the trouble of trying. Little had I thought at the time that the very attempt would prove the cause of his death; but I clearly perceived that the remembrance of my boyish feat, and the apparent ease with which it had been performed, had induced the unhappy man to make an effort for escape by that means.

In answer to my enquiries regarding the hour at which the body had been found, the young officer replied: "Oh, it was early this morning. I was about to march, as, of course, it is my duty to return to Rennes, as soon as possible, though I thought it right, for the safety of the château, to remain all last night."

I smiled, and remarking that I did so, he went on, with a smile, in return: "It was, as I said, early this morning; but although I caught a glance of Mademoiselle de Villardin a few moments ago, I thought it useless to speak with her about it, as she has seen more of cutting throats and breaking heads already than ladies generally like. So I reserved my news for you, Monsieur le Baron, as you seem to command the garrison, I think."

It is wonderful how soon a Frenchman discovers it, if there be love going on in a house; and it was easy to see, by the gay look which accompanied his words, to what the young officer alluded by my commanding the garrison. Nor did I doubt that, on his return to Rennes, he would carry a full account along with him of all the changes which had taken place in the arrangements of Monsieur de Villardin's family; but as those changes were very satisfactory to myself, of course I did not now much care whether the world were a sharer in my secret or not. Without any comment, then, on that part of his speech, I accompanied him to take a view of the body of Gaspard de Belleville, and found that as his skull had been terribly fractured by the fall, his death must have been instantaneous. Such being the case, I was not sorry that he had been spared all the horrors of a public execution, and therefore I had very little to regret in his death. I was sorry, indeed, that I had not obtained from him some explanations in regard to all that had occurred, which he alone could have afforded. A thousand times during the preceding evening I had been upon the point of visiting him in his confinement; but something had always occurred to prevent my doing so till it was too late; and, to say the truth, it was not very probable that he would have given me any satisfactory reply in the state of sullen despair into which he had fallen. Nothing, however, was now to be done further than to see the young officer march off with his men to Rennes, which he soon after did, carrying with him the two prisoners who remained. They, at their very first interview with the police, were recognised as arrant malefactors; and at the end of ten days expiated many an enormity, besides that under which we had suffered, by the forfeiture of their lives upon the scaffold.

Once more left in the château with none but its usual inhabitants, I immediately proceeded to the chamber of Monsieur de Villardin, whom I found infinitely better than I could have expected. He felt that he had been wounded, he said, it was true; but with the exception of some slight pain and stiffness, he was as well as ever. Laura was with him when I entered; and, with the permission of the surgeon, we remained at his bedside for nearly an hour.

When we left him we were joined by Father Ferdinand, who, informing me that he was about to send to Dumont for some books, suggested that by the same messenger I should recall my servants and little Clement de la Marke, which was accordingly done. The good priest remained with us till after dinner, and then perhaps feeling that both in Laura's heart and mine there was many a topic of conversation which could not be discussed before anyone, he left us to ourselves for the rest of the evening. How that evening passed must be imagined; for all the happiness, and the dreams, and the rapture, and the mutual questions and explanations that ensued, cannot be described. The cup of joy was never drained more deeply, and never tasted sweeter, than when, after all the agony we had suffered, we felt ourselves at length assured of happiness, and of each other.

We were again admitted to Monsieur de Villardin for an hour before he went to sleep; and, as he still continued wonderfully well, all apprehensions on his account vanished, and not a drop of bitter mingled with the sweet.

It was late when we parted; and, seeking my own apartments, I was about to give myself up to that more quiet and contemplative enjoyment which had now succeeded after all the hurried and fluttering rapture of the reciprocation of words of hope and affection with a being so dearly beloved, on the termination of all our sorrows and anxieties; but a light tap at my door disturbed me; and, opening it, I beheld Lise, who had spent the greater part of the day in Rennes, appearing now with a face of some anxiety and consternation. When one has suffered much pain and frequent disappointment, it is extraordinary how apprehensive the heart becomes; and I immediately concluded, from the countenance of the soubrette, that some new misfortune or catastrophe had occurred to mar all our joy.

"Come in, Lise—come in!" I cried.—"What is the matter? You look frightened!"

"Oh, Monsieur," she replied, "I am afraid that I have got myself into a terrible scrape!"

Selfishness is certainly inherent in man; and it was, I confess, an infinite relief to me to hear that her anxieties were personal. I desired her, however, as kindly as I could, to tell me what was the matter, promising to do everything in my power to assist her in her difficulty.

"Oh, that you are bound to do, Monsieur le Baron," she replied; "for it was all done on your account. But I will tell you all about it. You remember I informed you that I knew of a priest who, for a small sum, would marry you and Mademoiselle privately; but I did not tell you that I went a day or two after and spoke to him all about it, being very sure that you would be obliged to come to a private marriage at last—which you would, too, if it had not been for all this affair. However, as I was saying, I went and told him all about it, as we were walking along under the Thabor, thinking that nobody on earth was there but ourselves; and just as we had done, and he had promised to do all that I wanted, up got a man from amongst the trees and walked away over the mount. Well, we did not heed him particularly, but he must have overheard all we said; for this morning, when I went down to Rennes, I saw the priest, whose name I will not mention, and who made such an outcry against me, saying that I had been his ruin. When I asked what was the matter, he told me that early yesterday morning a man came to him saying, that Mademoiselle Lise, of the château at the Près Vallée, had sent him to say, that the young lady and gentleman who were to be married, did not dare to venture into Rennes; but that if he would follow to the old chapel in the forest, which was regularly consecrated, they would meet him there, and that he should have two thousand livres for his pains. Although he thought it somewhat strange altogether, yet the two thousand livres tempted him, and he went; but when he came there he found himself in the hands of the robbers, and all that horrible business took place, of which Mademoiselle gave me such a dreadful account last night."

"So, so!" I said. "So this was the priest, was it, ma bonne Lise! Well, all I can tell you in regard to him is, that he seemed to have neither fear nor reluctance in obeying all that the villains told him to do; and sincerely do I think he deserves most exemplary punishment for his pains."

"Ah, but, Monsieur!" cried Lise, "you cannot punish him without punishing me too; for, as sure as we are all alive, he will tell everything that I proposed to him to do, if the other matter is found out; and then, you know, the Duke will send me away from Mademoiselle; and then I shall die of grief and vexation; and all because I wished to help you and my young lady in your love."

Although I felt perfectly sure that Lise's acquaintance, the priest, was as great a villain as any of the robbers in whose hands I had found him, and doubted not that the great part of their information had come from him, yet I thought it much better to let the matter sleep, than, by taking any measures to punish him, to make a general *exposé* of all that had occurred during the last two or three months at the Près Vallée, which, though innocent enough on all parts, and certainly not discreditable to anyone for whom my affections were deeply engaged, would be far better confined, as far as possible, to our own household, without being blazed forth to the rude, evil-reporting world. For poor Lise, too—although she had certainly acted sillily—I could not of course help feeling a regard, as one of those whom she intended to benefit by the very act which was now likely to prove of detriment to herself; and I hastened to relieve her mind by assuring her that I would not only take no measures to bring the offences of the priest to light, but would do all in my power to prevent any further investigation of the affair.

"It will be better for him," I added, speaking of the priest—"it will be better for him, however, to betake himself to some other part of the country for a time, as Monsieur de Villardin and a number of the servants must have seen him, and may recognise him in the city the first time we chance to visit it. Give him that advice, therefore, my good Lise, and tell him, that in case he wants a few livres to enable him to change his cure for the time, they shall be furnished to him forthwith, on the understanding that he is to quit Rennes."

Lise's heart overflowed with gratitude and satisfaction; and, promising to communicate all my directions to the priest, and undertaking that he should obey them implicitly, she left me with a mind relieved. Nor did I, indeed, anticipate much chance of the priest being discovered and punished; for I am sorry to say that such offences, especially in Brittany, were at that time suffered to pass with very singular impunity.

I was an earlier riser on the following day than I had been on that morning; and daybreak found me up and in the ante-room of Monsieur de Villardin. The truth was, that the excitement of my mind was no longer counterbalanced by the fatigue of my body, and, consequently, I slept little all night, though the reveries that visited my couch were certainly as sweet as any that ever blessed the heart of man. I was somewhat anxious about Monsieur de Villardin too, as the surgeon had told me that in case of any danger supervening from his wound, it was likely to show itself during that night. The

Duke, however, was asleep when I entered; and, though the surgeon who had sat up with him informed me that some slight fever had appeared, he added, that it was nothing more than the inevitable consequences of the injury he had received, and that the slumber which followed was an indubitable sign that no evil was to be anticipated. I remained in the Duke's apartments till he woke, which did not take place for several hours, and I then found him refreshed and easy, so that all apprehension was at an end.

In the evening my servants and Clement de la Marke arrived from Dumont; and the boy petitioned so earnestly to see Monsieur de Villardin, that Father Ferdinand, with the consent of the surgeon, permitted him to do so. Monsieur de Villardin's convalescence was progressive and rapid. Every cloud seemed wafted away from our fate; every tear seemed wiped away from our eyes; and nothing but the smile of joy or the sunshine of happiness was seen within the château, so lately the abode of misery and apprehension. At the end of a few days, Monsieur de Villardin was suffered to rise; at the end of a few more, he was permitted to come down for some hours each day; and, ere a fortnight was over, he was walking up and down the terrace, leaning upon my arm, more from weakness induced by the treatment he had undergone in order to prevent inflammation and fever, than from the actual consequences of his wound.

Our old habits were soon resumed; and it added not a little to my happiness to see the evident pleasure with which Monsieur de Villardin beheld the undisguised affection of his daughter and myself. Often, indeed, he would speak of it to me in terms of the highest satisfaction; and again and again he assured me, as he had done before, that if he had entertained a thought that our hearts were so deeply bound to each other, he would never, on any account, have promised Laura's hand to another.

"As soon," he said, when conversing with me one day upon our present circumstances, and our future prospects—"as soon as it be possible, I will put the last seal to your union. I look upon it, indeed, as an atonement I owe you both for not having seen your mutual affection, as I might well have done, and for all that I was obliged to make you suffer in consequence of my own blindness. We must, however, in the first instance, suffer the memory of this other business to die away in some slight degree, especially as you well know that it is, in this country, necessary to obtain the consent of his Majesty in the first place. I feel sure, indeed, that both your services and mine will plead too strongly in our favour for any difficulty to occur in our obtaining the royal approbation, which is seldom, if ever, refused where no obstacle is raised on the part of the parents. But still, under all circumstances, I should much wish you to serve through another campaign, in the course of which I doubt not that you will establish new and powerful claims upon the throne."

"I do not know, monseigneur," I replied, laughing; "but one thing I feel very sure of, which is, that, with all the inducements I now have to love life, and the things that it contains, I shall be certainly much more careful of my own person than I used to be in days of old."

"That will be no disadvantage, De Juvigny," replied Monsieur de Villardin, almost gravely. "You were always too careless of your own person; and, in the last campaign, rash to a vice. To observe it in you was a matter of pain and surprise to me, till I discovered your love for Laura; and then, though fully appreciating the generous feelings which made you prefer death rather than wrong me in the least point, yet I was sorry to find that you should think any circumstances sufficient to justify a man in seeking to terminate his own existence. Do you think, De Juvigny, that I have not had cause sufficient to snatch at death, if ever man ought to do it? Do you think that I have not had temptations to self-destruction, had I not felt that such an act is base and cowardly, as well as absurd?"

"I do not deny, my Lord," I replied, "that some feelings, such as you suppose, might influence me at first, after discovering what was the state of my own heart towards Mademoiselle de Villardin. But I soon saw the folly of yielding to them; and I can assure you, upon my honour, that if, during the rest of the campaign, I exposed myself unnecessarily, it was done unconsciously."

"I am glad to hear it, De Juvigny; I am glad to hear it," replied Monsieur de Villardin; "for it was certainly the greatest fault I ever saw you commit. However, when you join the army again, be as careful of your own person as it is in your nature to be; and remember, that if you fall, Laura loses a husband, and I lose a son. There are few men," he added, smiling, "to whom one would willingly address such cautions in sending them forth to battle. But I know that it would be difficult to put too many checks upon you."

Although I certainly did not anticipate any further impediment to my happiness, yet it was very natural that I should desire to call Laura my wife before I again joined the army. Nor did I fail to let Monsieur de Villardin know that such was the case; but he, of course, preferred his plan to mine, and I was obliged to yield with a good grace. At the time that this conversation took place, which was about three weeks after my return from Dumont, there still remained full two, if not three, months, ere I was likely again to be called to the field; and as one probably makes up one's mind to that which is remote more easily than to that which is near at hand, Laura and myself did not suffer the prospect of being once more separated before our union, to disturb our happiness in the meantime.

There was only one thing, however, which gave me uneasiness, which was, to observe that, although the surgeons had declared Monsieur de Villardin to be well, and had consequently taken their leave, yet that he himself did not seem to think his recovery so perfect as they did. The ball was still lodged in his body, the surgeons declaring that it had formed itself a bed under the shoulder bone, whence it could not be extracted, and where it could occasion neither inconvenience nor injury; but still Monsieur de Villardin complained of occasional pain, and I remarked that, in the morning, he was more than commonly gloomy and depressed, while every evening his spirits rose to a much higher pitch than had been usual with him for many years, and a bright flush took possession of his cheek, very different from its usual colour.

All this made me uneasy; and I saw that he himself was not satisfied with his own situation, often talking of going to some of those places in the Pyrenees, the waters of which are famous for the cure of gunshot wounds. I did all that I could to encourage this idea, and also to amuse and occupy his mind in the morning, when he seemed most depressed. But it was in vain that I made the latter attempt; he seemed to love solitude, and to be somewhat impatient of interruption or society. The autumn proved a very rainy one; and, when he was not able to go out, he passed the greater part of the time in his library, busily occupied in writing and arranging his papers and affairs. From the rapid and accurate manner in which he prepared for the future, one would have supposed that he anticipated a very speedy termination of his life, and yet his conversation did not show that to be the case. He spoke of many years to come, and laid out long plans for after life: but yet, when forced to stay at home, he busied himself with everything that could imply the speedy approach of death.

When the weather was fine, his occupations were very different. He would saunter slowly out for hours, sometimes accompanied by Father Ferdinand, but more frequently alone; and indeed, as I have before said, he did not seem to covet any society. At night he sat with Laura and myself till we separated for the evening; and I never, even when first I knew him, beheld him so bright, so cheerful, as he appeared on these occasions, during nearly ten days after his wound was healed.

At length, one night he expressed his determination of going to Barège, as soon as the season permitted; and laid out a plan by which I might accompany him and Laura thither, even if an early commencement of the campaign prevented me from remaining with them all the time of their stay. The whole arrangement seemed to please him, and he retired to rest, in high spirits, at about ten o'clock. The next morning he came down sad and gloomy; and, after breakfast, ordered his hat and cloak to be brought in, scarcely interchanging a word with anyone. A glance from Laura's eye made me offer to accompany him on his walk; but he replied decidedly, though in a kindly tone, "No, I thank you, my dear boy; I would rather be alone. It is a fine day, however, for the time of year, and you and Laura had better ride or walk out together." Thus saying, he left us; and about an hour afterwards Laura and myself—followed by Lise, and with Clement de la Marke hovering round us like a scared lapwing, now hanging close to my side, now walking on at a great distance, and affecting, with boyish playfulness, not to intrude on the conversation of the lovers—set out to take advantage of the short sunshine of that season.

Had not the tone of Monsieur de Villardin been so very decided in regard to his wish for solitude, we might have endeavoured to meet him on his walk; but now we felt that it was necessary rather to choose some path which he was not likely to take. As Laura left it to me to determine, I proposed that we should go to the spot which had been our place of meeting when regret, and sorrow, and expectation of speedy separation, served sadly to allay the brief joy of being in each other's society for a time. We had not been there since the whole had been reversed; and as our fears for the future had then served to deaden the enjoyments of the present, the remembrances of the past now tended only to enhance, in the highest degree, all the delight of the moment, and the anticipation of bright joys in the time to come. Everything that we saw as we walked along recalled some idea of painful separations now to take place no more—of dreams constantly dispelled by the consciousness that they were but dreams—of happiness turned into misery by the certainty that it must end—of wishes that had become pangs from the expectation of their disappointment. But now the recollection of such things in the past added, as I have said, a zest to all the joy of our hearts; and it would be necessary to know, or rather to feel, how deeply two hearts can be attached to each other, before anyone can conceive how bright—how glorious—how dream-like was the happiness that we then experienced!

Thus we wandered on from meadow to meadow, and from grove to grove, till at length the scene of our meetings, the tall gigantic trees, the soft green turf, the small rise in the ground, connected in my mind with so many various memories, presented themselves to our eyes, still beautiful and soft, though any leaves that lingered on the trees were withered, and the grey hue of approaching winter was over all the scene.

A few steps taken forward, however, showed me something lying in a heap, as it were, upon the very grave of the Count de Mesnil; and a sudden sinking of my heart took place, with feelings of apprehension that I could not well explain. The same sight had caught the eyes of Laura also, and pointing forward, she exclaimed, "What is that?" As she did so, she paused for a single instant; but at that moment fear seemed to become prophetic in her bosom. Where we stood it was certainly impossible for her to discern even the form of a human being; but exclaiming, "Good God! it is my father!" she drew her arm from mine, and darted on with the speed of light.

I followed as quick as possible; but ere I overtook her, she reached the foot of the tree, and, with a shriek of horror, dropped down as if she had been shot. There was, indeed, sufficient cause; for there, stretched upon the very grave in which his hand and mine had laid his adversary, with his hat fallen off on one side, and his outstretched hand clasping a rosary, appeared the inanimate form of Monsieur de Villardin, with an immense quantity of blood which had flowed from his mouth and nostrils, deluging the turf on every side, and dabbling his mantle and his left arm, which was stretched upon the ground.

The great loss of blood, the position in which he had fallen, the rigidity of his form when I endeavoured to raise him, all showed me that he who for so many years had been my friend, and more than my father,—with whom I had gone through such scenes of interest,—who had showed me such undeviating and disinterested affection,—was no more a being of this earth. I never felt mortality more bitterly; but on him all care was vain, and my attention—as well as that of Lise and the page—was directed towards his unhappy child, whose temporary loss of feeling and reflection was, perhaps, the best thing that could happen to her at the time. I bore her in my arms to one of the woodmen's cottages at about half a mile distance, sending the boy back with all speed to the château for aid and assistance.

All the inhabitants of the building were soon poured forth; the body of Monsieur de Villardin was removed to the castle; and the carriage having been procured, poor Laura was carried back to her own apartments, falling from one fainting fit into another, with intervals only sufficient to recall the horrible sight she had beheld, ere she was again lost in unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XLI.

I LEFT Laura in the hands of her women; and despatching a messenger for medical aid from Rennes, turned, with a heavy heart, to the library, in which the body of the Duke had been placed. The room was crowded with servants, gathered together in a semi-circle at the end nearest the door, and gazing forward towards the corpse, while a feeling of reverence and awe kept them from approaching further, as Father Ferdinand, with a degree of emotion which I had never before beheld in him, stood near the head of his dead friend and wept aloud. Clement de la Marke had crept close up, and wept also; and passing on, I, too, gazed upon the countenance which had beamed so many kind things upon me, and I joined my tears to theirs.

It was a sad and sorrowful sight; and in grief and deep mourning passed over that day, and many that succeeded. Messengers were sent round all the country to every relation and friend of the deceased nobleman; and as there was no necessity for immediate interment, the funeral was delayed till the old Count de Lorris could arrive, as it was believed that to him had been assigned the temporary guardianship of Mademoiselle de Villardin, and the execution of the will of the deceased. Every direction was given, and every measure taken by Father Ferdinand, who seemed to feel himself fully justified, by his long friendship with Monsieur de Villardin, to take the command of all, till such time as his own will could be ascertained. Laura was, of course, incompetent to make any of the painful arrangements herself; and to me and Father Ferdinand she seemed to cling with redoubled affection, from the bereavement which she had just undergone. During the ten days which the funeral was delayed, the body of Monsieur de Villardin was embalmed; and in the course of that operation, it was discovered that the ball which he had received in the forest had lodged close upon one of the large blood-vessels of the chest, and although it had not wounded the artery at the time, yet that it had created a degree of inflammation round it, which had gradually worn it away, so that probably the great emotion to which Monsieur de Villardin had subjected himself, in visiting, for the first time, the scene of the Count de Mesnil's death, had caused a rupture of the vessel, which might not otherwise have taken place for months.

At length Monsieur de Lorris arrived; the friends and relations of the deceased nobleman were all assembled; and the funeral took place. I shall not pause on so sad a ceremony, which was, perhaps, more painful to my feelings, from the careless indifference of the many who attended it, contrasting with the grief of my own heart. As soon as it was over, the notaries opened the seals which had been placed upon all the papers of Monsieur de Villardin; and as Laura had refused to be present, Monsieur de Lorris, on her part, received the large packet of freshly-written papers, to which the notary, who had been so constantly with the Duke for some weeks, guided us at once. The first thing that appeared was the will of the deceased nobleman, which had been drawn up a few days before his death; and which, though it gave great dissatisfaction to his two nearest cousins, was exactly such as those who knew him best might have anticipated. He appointed three guardians to his daughter—Father Ferdinand, the Count de Lorris, and myself, at the same time expressing, in the strongest manner, his will that she should become my wife as soon as a decent space of mourning for his loss was over. He here, too, pointed out what had been evident before, that he felt his life would not be of long duration; and he stated precisely that it was his intention to see me united to his daughter, if he lived long enough; in which case, of course, that will was to be considered null and void. He then went on to dispose of his property, leaving all his hereditary estates, which, as well as those of his wife, naturally descended to his daughter, to follow the legal course; but from the wealth which, in the retired life he had generally led, he had accumulated to a very great extent, and from the lands he had purchased, he made many bequests. All his old servants were amply provided for; a number of charities and religious institutions were remembered with great liberality; a year's rent was remitted to all his tenants; and stating it to be a personal mark of his affection and gratitude towards me, for many benefits that he could never sufficiently repay, he left me all the rest of his purchased lands, forming, together, a fortune superior to that of many of the first nobles in France.—His relations in general, with whom, as I have before stated, he lived in terms of no great affection, were not even mentioned; and I could see many a heavy brow knit upon me with passions which might have found a louder tongue, had it not been well known that I was not one to pass over insult or injury in silence. The same persons who had been appointed guardians to Mademoiselle de Villardin were required to see the will put in execution; and to them were added Monsieur de Vins, the governor of the province of Brittany, to whom a handsome legacy had also been assigned.

The two nearest relatives of the late Duke, after listening attentively to the document, which was read by the notary, declared their intention of endeavouring to set aside, at least, that part of it which appointed strangers to be the guardians of the young heiress, citing the custom of Brittany, which bestowed that office upon the nearest of kin. But the notary, with a smile, pointed out that Monsieur de Villardin had been fully aware of that fact, and had taken the means provided by the law for effectually barring their claim; and read at the same time a note appended to the will, in which the Duke formally declared, that he had considered their title to the guardianship; and, after mature deliberation, had rejected it, believing them to be unfitted for it by their views of private interest. Mortified, disappointed, and affecting great indignation, they quitted the room, and sought their horses, while the notary proceeded to lay before us the other papers. Of these, several were addressed to Monsieur de Lorris, several to Father Ferdinand, and several to myself. Amongst the last, I found a letter to the King himself, and in the envelope a desire expressed that I would send it to Paris immediately, and afterwards would deliver, in person, to his Majesty the baton of field marshal which Monsieur de Villardin had so lately received.

As all the other papers found were of a private nature, we now left the library; and, having eaten and drank as if they came on a festive rather than a mournful occasion, those who had been called to the funeral dropped away one by one, and the house resumed its calm and gloomy solitude. As yet I had scarcely had time to speak with Monsieur de Lorris; but I now found the worthy old man as full of affection and regard for me as when last we met. He was overjoyed, he said, that Monsieur de Villardin had fixed upon one as a husband for his daughter, who had already shown that he was capable of protecting her in any circumstances of difficulty or danger. He asked a number of questions, however, concerning my family; and although, to avoid hurting my feelings, he did so under the semblance of taking an interest in my history and affairs, yet I could see that the good Count was anxious to assure himself that the heiress of the houses of De Villardin and Lorris was not about to make a *mésalliance.* I answered him frankly and candidly, and I was happy to find that my replies gave him every sort of satisfaction. The Earl of Norwich, he said, of whom I had spoken, was then in France; and, he doubted not, would be happy to see the son of his old friend.

I was not a little delighted to find that he was so, as it gave me the means of confirming, at once, to anyone interested, all the facts which I have related connected with my early history. While my conversation took place with the old Count, Father Ferdinand had retired to his own apartments; and, when I had explained to Monsieur de Lorris everything concerning myself, and a number of other events connected with Monsieur de Villardin, we sent up to enquire after Laura's health, and whether we might be permitted to wait upon her. She replied, however, that she felt too unwell to see even her dearest friends at that moment; but that she hoped to have recovered sufficient composure, by the following morning, to receive us both.

The rest of the evening was principally spent in my own apartments, looking over the papers which Monsieur de Villardin had left addressed to myself; and certainly all the signs of strong affection and regard, which I found in every line, tended to make me feel more deeply than ever the loss I had sustained. The papers consisted chiefly of kind admonitions and advice concerning my own conduct in the high station of life which I should be called to fill in France after my marriage with his daughter, and of directions as to the manner of obtaining most easily the King's signature to our marriage contract. Amongst others, he gave me a copy of the letter which he had himself written to his Majesty, and which made it his last and dying request that the monarch would confirm the arrangements he had made. He also informed the King that he had desired me to write to his Majesty immediately, requesting his consent, in order that Mademoiselle de Villardin might not be longer than necessary without that degree of protection which none but a husband or a father could afford.

Such manifold proofs of confidence, and such minute care for my happiness and welfare, were far more gratifying to my heart than the splendid fortune he had left me, or indeed than anything he could bestow, except the hand of that dear girl whose heart already was my own. It was late at night before the reading of all these papers, and the reflections to which they gave rise, came to an end; and towards two o'clock I retired to bed, resolving to consult Monsieur de Lorris and Father Ferdinand the next morning, concerning the terms in which I was to address the King, a matter wherewith I was very little acquainted. The next morning, however, I was up early; and, as I was descending towards the saloon, I was waylaid by Lise, who informed me that her mistress was anxious to see me, for the first time after her father's funeral, without any other persons being present; and feeling, equally with herself, how much better it was that it should be so, I gladly followed to the little boudoir attached to her apartment.

She was sitting watching for my coming, with her feelings still highly excited; and the moment she saw me she rose, threw herself into my arms, and wept long and bitterly. It was as if she had said, "I have none but you now upon the earth. Forgive me if I mourn for those that are gone." When the first burst of tears was over, she spoke more calmly, and, in a long and interesting, though often painful, conversation, frequently interrupted by tears, she suffered me to recapitulate to her all that had been done, and to tell her exactly the state in which she stood. In the end, as it was necessary that she should make an effort to resume her usual occupations, she suffered me to lead her down to the saloon; and, though every now and then some object, or some association, would agitate her for a time, our conversation was here renewed, and proceeded more tranquilly till, in about half an hour after, we were joined by Father Ferdinand and the Count de Lorris. Laura received them with less painful emotions than I had expected; and the day passed over sadly indeed, and gloomily, but calmly upon the whole. When informed of the nature of her father's letter to the King, she wished much that it should be delayed for a day or two; but when it was explained to her that to do so might give high offence, she yielded at once; and in the evening I applied to Monsieur de Lorris and Father Ferdinand for directions as to the form and manner in which I was to couch my application to the King.

"My dear young friend," replied Monsieur de Lorris, "I never was happy enough to be married myself, and consequently cannot exactly tell you what are the precise terms you should use in requesting the King's consent to your union with my niece."

"I think I can direct you, my son," replied Father Ferdinand, "though I have never been married either;" and, taking up the pen, he wrote down the copy of a formal letter to the King with as much ease and accuracy as if he had been accustomed, throughout his life, to the etiquette and ceremonial of courts rather than to the shade of the cloister and the retirement of the country. After referring to the directions which I had received from Monsieur de Villardin to that effect, he begged to know when I might be permitted to lay at his Majesty's feet the baton of field-marshal, which I was charged to deliver; and, in requesting the signature of his Majesty to my marriage contract with Mademoiselle de Villardin, it was obvious that, though he avoided everything which might look like presumption, yet he took care not to assume that the King would at all hesitate to grant my request.

With many thanks, I copied the paper exactly; and the next morning it was despatched to Paris by a special messenger. The old Count de Lorris, who was kindness itself, agreed to remain with us till after my marriage with Laura had taken place; and, as it was naturally concluded that it would be more agreeable to me to remain at the Près Vallée with my future bride, Father Ferdinand undertook to make all the arrangements at Dumont, rendered necessary by M. de Villardin's decease, and he set off the following morning, accompanied by Clement de la Marke, whose eagerness for every change of scene and place put me not a little in mind of my own younger days. Laura's grief for the loss of her father abated but slowly; yet still, as ever with the human heart, the calm hand of time was continually taking something from the poignancy of her first affliction. We passed almost the whole of our hours in each other's society, and though softened by our mutual sorrow for the dead, those hours still remain among the bright things on which memory can rest so sweetly, and which she preserves for after years as a store of treasured enjoyments for the wintry season of our age.

Of course we felt some anxiety for the

return of our messenger from Paris; for though we never anticipated for a moment that the King would make any opposition to our marriage, sanctioned as it had been by Monsieur de Villardin himself, yet, when that which we ardently desire is shadowed by even the smallest doubt, the heart can never rest satisfied till certainty is substituted in the place of hope. At the end of eight days Father Ferdinand returned from Dumont; and two or three days more passed in hourly expectation of our messenger's appearance. We were well aware that common couriers, unless on some very extraordinary occasion, always take their time upon the road; but when another day passed, and another, and a whole fortnight elapsed without my receiving any answer to my application, we all became uneasy, and I even thought of setting off myself to Paris, to ascertain the cause of the delay. At length, late one evening, the messenger was ushered in, just as we were about to proceed to the supper-room. He instantly presented to me a packet; and, without ceremony, I cut the silk and opened it, when, within the envelope, I found a paper containing the following words, as the only reply which the King had vouchsafed to my request:—

"De par le Roy.

"Il est ordonné au Sieur Baron de Juvigny, Colonel du ——— régiment actuellement en Bretagne, de se rendre à la ville de Senlis pour y joindre son régiment. Fait à Fontainebleau, le 9 Février, 1658.

"Louis."

The paper dropped from my hand, and I believe that I turned deadly pale; for Laura, whose eyes were fixed upon me as I read, clasped her hands, exclaiming, "Good God! De Juvigny, what is the matter?" Father Ferdinand raised the paper, and, giving the messenger a sign to withdraw, read it aloud, while we all gazed upon each other in no small grief and consternation. The good Father's brow contracted strongly, and he said, "This is, indeed, unfavourable,—I might almost add, ungrateful, after all that has been done in the royal cause, at moments of its greatest need, by the two men whose best designs and dearest wishes the King appears inclined to thwart."

"It can only be," said Monsieur de Lorris, "that that foreign minion, Mazarine, knowing that our dear girl here is one of the greatest heiresses in France, designs to give her to some of his own creatures; but I will apply to the King myself; and fear not, my dear De Juvigny, for I will leave no means untried to obtain what we all desire, and I promise you, as a man of honour and a French nobleman, never to consent to her marriage with any person but yourself.

"I promise you the same, my son," added Father Ferdinand; "and, though it is long since I have set my foot in Paris, and I had hoped never to do so again, yet I will journey thither, and will make my voice heard in a manner which I do not think can be disregarded. Laura, too, must be firm; but I know that she will be so," he added. "Her father's will, her own affection, her positive promise, all bind her to you, De Juvigny, morally and religiously, as much as if she were your wife; and I solemnly declare not only that she ought not, but that she cannot, marry any other person."

"Never," said Laura, firmly, "never. Give me a pen and ink, De Juvigny. Let me make it irrevocable, that I may always have an answer ready to anyone who may press me on the subject;" and, sitting down to a table, she wrote, with a rapid and somewhat trembling hand, a far more forcible renewal of the promise which was implied in the paper which had been given me by her father.

I had remained in silence, and almost stupefied, while all this took place: but I now laid down the order to join my regiment on the table, saying, "I will immediately resign my command in his Majesty's service. I know that Laura cares not for splendour or station, and I will request her to become mine, before anyone can separate us. All that the utmost tyranny can do is to deprive her of those estates, which others value more than we do; and we have enough, without them, to render us happy and independent, in whatever land we may choose to make our home."

"No, no, De Juvigny," cried Father Ferdinand; "you are too hasty, my son. As yet we cannot at all tell what are the real intentions of his Majesty; and well might he feel himself offended and insulted by such want of confidence in his justice, and such precipitate haste. When the will of our late friend is laid before him—when the solicitations of Monsieur de Lorris, and all whom he can interest, have been heard—when a number of peculiar circumstances, which I have to relate, are made known to the royal ear—there can be very little doubt that his Majesty will yield his consent; and even should he not, if you are inclined to take Laura portionless, it will always be in your power to do so, after having shown a noble obedience to the commands of the King, and a due estimation of the duty of a soldier. Perhaps it may be his Majesty's design merely to try you; and, in that case, I would not for the world you should be found deficient, after having distinguished yourself so honourably already in his service. No, no. Take my advice. Obey at once; and, depend upon it, such conduct will meet its reward."

I felt convinced in my heart that the line of conduct which Father Ferdinand suggested was that which my duty called upon me to pursue; but passion, of course, led me a contrary way; and I still urged my own plan arguing that means might be taken to prevent my ever seeing Laura again. This, however, they showed me was impossible; and Monsieur de Lorris joined his arguments strongly to those of Father Ferdinand. I found, too, that Laura herself had an invincible repugnance to wedding anyone so soon after her father's death, as the scheme which I proposed implied. I was obliged to abandon it, then, and nothing remained but to obey immediately the order I had received, without even hesitation or remonstrance.—Father Ferdinand and Monsieur de Lorris promised to set out for Paris as soon as possible, and seemed so confident of being able to effect the object that they sought, that they restored some degree of hope to my heart, which had almost been given up to despair, when I first beheld what the packet had contained.

One day was needed for preparation: but, when once my determination was fixed, I felt that the sooner it was executed the better; and, on the second morning after receiving the royal commands, taking leave of all that I loved on earth, with pain and apprehension, on which I shall not dwell, I mounted my horse, and, followed by my little train, rode off to join my regiment at Senlis.

CHAPTER XLII.

On arriving at Senlis it became sufficiently evident, from the state of inactivity in which I was left, that the object of the King, or rather of his minister, was solely to remove me from the neighbourhood of Mademoiselle de Villardin; and that no real necessity existed for my presence with a regiment quartered at a distance from any danger, and employed in no service whatever. Although the rash despair to which I had formerly yielded had now quitted my mind, I trust, for ever, yet I fell into a state of deep despondency, from which I was only roused for a moment on those days when I received one of the frequent letters with which Laura endeavoured to console me. From Father Ferdinand and the Count de Lorris I heard less frequently, and their letters, certainly, gave me less food for hope than those of Laura. They had left the Près Vallée about ten days after I myself had quitted it, and had proceeded to Paris to petition the King in person. As it was judged expedient to secure some female companion for the young heiress during the absence of all her guardians, one of the nuns of St. Ursula, having obtained a dispensation to that effect, remained with Laura at the Près Vallée; but, as she exercised no control over her actions, this arrangement did not at all interrupt our constant communication. The journey of Father Ferdinand and the Count, however, produced no very rapid effects. Several weeks passed before they could obtain a private audience; and when, at length, it was granted, the only reply they received was, that the King acknowledged my services, and would consider my claims.

It appeared to me that no great consideration was wanting; but while this intentional delay continued, the month of May ushered in our military operations. The King put himself at the head of the army destined to cover the frontier; and Turenne led a small force, of which my regiment formed a part, to the siege of Dunkirk. I will not pause upon the details of a campaign which, having taken place so lately, is too well known to need any relation. My own conduct during the year that followed was, of course, greatly affected by the circumstances in which I stood. Although I did not forget the exhortations to prudence which I had received from Monsieur de Villardin, yet it was not in my nature to calculate personal dangers; and the eagerness which I now felt, by important services, to shame down all opposition to my just claims, quickened every faculty, and made me lose no opportunity. As I knew, however, that the eye of the bravest, but most cautious, general of the age was upon me, I endeavoured, as far as possible, to guard against even the appearance of imprudence; and, luckily, I was in this, at least, quite successful. Knowing that in the siege a cavalry regiment would probably have but little opportunity of distinguishing itself, I endeavoured, in our march upon Dunkirk, to find those occasions for service which I might afterwards be deprived of; and as the enemy's preparations were rapid and energetic, I was tolerably successful. The greatest service which I was thus enabled to render was at the passage of the Lys. Having been thrown forward to reconnoitre, I came suddenly upon a redoubt of the enemy, placed to defend the very passage upon which the army was marching. I was suffered to approach so near without being noticed, that I thought I might as well push on; and, dismounting one of the troops, I was in possession of the place, to my own surprise, as well as that of the Spaniards, before they knew anything of our approach.

But two men were lost in the momentary struggle which took place in the redoubt; and instantly sending news to the Marshal of our unexpected success, I had the satisfaction of seeing the army pass the river without the slightest opposition. At night I was called to the quarters of Monsieur de Turenne, with whom I had a long private interview, in which I explained to him my precise situation, and told him the great incentive to exertion which was now before me.

"Well, well, my son," he said, in a kindly tone, as I took my leave; "well, well, I will do my best for you; and fear not that your services shall have a fair report at court."

This promise with some men might not have implied much, but it was Turenne who spoke, and the words did not convey one half of his intentions in my favour. The siege of Dunkirk succeeded; and no day passed without my being furnished with some means of obtaining honour and applause. I endeavoured to deserve such kindness; and whether employed in covering the foraging parties, or in the more laborious and less glorious occupation of bringing fascines, I tried by activity, perseverance, and care, to distinguish myself from others to whom the same services were assigned. At length the Spanish army, commanded by the Prince de Condé, advanced to the succour of Dunkirk, and the famous battle of the Sand Hills took place. Under the command of the Marquis of Castelnau, my regiment formed part of the left wing, which, marching along the river, turned the enemy's flank; and I had here every opportunity of displaying whatever military qualities I might possess. My men seconded me most gallantly; and the Marquis de Castlenau being severely wounded, the command of the two thousand seven hundred men of which alone that division was composed fell upon me for the time.

Turenne himself thanked me the next morning, at the head of my regiment, for the services I had rendered; and Dunkirk having surrendered shortly after, I heard, with no small satisfaction, that the young king himself, with all his court, was about to visit the camp. Unfortunately the smallness of our force, and the great want of cavalry, caused the regiments of horse to be in continual requisition; and two days before the arrival of the King I was detached towards Bergues, in order, as far as possible, to prevent the enemy from taking measures to retard our progress in the siege of that town, which was now determined. I saw that Turenne was grieved when he gave the order; but, of course, he could suffer no private consideration to interfere with the service of the King.

Bergues was soon taken, and a number of other places followed, the most important of which was Gravelines. At length the siege of Ypres was determined; but ere the trenches were opened an event occurred which prevented my witnessing the rest of the campaign. In the course of our march upon Menin, a report reached head-quarters that the Prince de Lignes, with a small force, was posted at the distance of a league and a half, and Turenne immediately detached the Comte de Roye in order to dislodge the enemy. My regiment formed part of the force under that officer's command; and the position of the Prince de Lignes was soon forced, his infantry nearly cut to pieces, and his cavalry in full retreat. The pursuit was intrusted to myself, and I followed the enemy almost to the gates of Ypres. There, however, they rallied, made a gallant charge, and in the *mêlée* I received a severe cut on the head, which passed through my helmet and even wounded the skull. I was under the horse's feet in an instant, but luckily I received no further injury; and when I recovered from the stunning effect of the blow, I found myself a prisoner in the town of Ypres.

Surgeons were busy dressing my wounds, and one or two officers of some rank were standing round the table on which I had been laid. As I opened my eyes, one of the lookers on bade another tell the Prince; and in a moment after the Prince de Lignes was standing by my side. After asking the surgeon whether he might speak with me with due regard to my safety, and hearing his opinion that I was not seriously injured, he addressed me by my name.

"Monsieur de Juvigny," he said, "we are happy in having taken an officer of your merit and distinction, as, probably, you can give us some information which the other prisoners are either not able or not willing to afford. What we wish to know is, whether Monsieur de Turenne does or does not really intend to sit down before this place?"

I felt some difficulty in articulating; but I replied as well as I could, "You must be aware, sir, that it is my duty to refuse answers to all such questions."

"Certainly," he rejoined, "if by so doing you contributed to put us on our guard, or to afford any facility for opposing the enemy; but I give you my honour that we have neither means nor inclination to make any further preparations than we have done for the defence of the place, and my sole purpose in asking the question is to send away, out of pure compassion, a number of the poor and needy citizens, who must die of starvation if Monsieur de Turenne attempts to reduce the place by famine; which must be his plan if he have any design against Ypres, as I find he has no battering train with his army. As a good soldier and a worthy gentleman you will see at once that every principle of humanity requires me to clear the town of all unnecessary mouths. You yourself, and all the other wounded and prisoners, must be sent off to Brussels at all risks if such should be the intention of the French general; so answer me candidly, I entreat you."

"Sir," I replied, "you must judge of what *your* duty requires of *you*—mine is straightforward. If it be the intention of Monsieur de Turenne to starve you out, the more persons you have to feed the better for his purpose; and although I confess I would fain escape being sent to Brussels in my present state, yet I can give you no information."

"I must even send you thither, then," replied the Prince; and in a brief conversation with the other officers present I heard him say, "Oh! depend upon it, if they were not determined to attack the place he would say so to avoid the journey."

"No, indeed, Monsieur le Prince!" I exclaimed. "You are mistaken. I would not give you one tittle of intelligence if I knew that Monsieur de Turenne was going to retread his steps to-morrow."

The Prince smiled and left the room; and after having been tended carefully during the rest of that evening and the following night, I was put into a carriage early the next morning, and with a number of other wounded persons, as well as prisoners, and all those who were desirous of quitting the town, was sent on, not indeed to Brussels, but to Tournay.

Fearful that a report of my being killed might reach Laura, I sat up at the first halting place, and in spite of all remonstrances from a surgeon who accompanied us, wrote a letter to the Près Vallée, assuring her that though a prisoner and slightly wounded, I was in no danger. Of this letter the commander of our little escort, a gallant young Spaniard, who spoke French very tolerably, took charge, promising to despatch it to France by the very first opportunity.

Whether it was the heat of the weather, the fatigue of the journey, or, as the surgeon predicted, the exertion of writing which irritated my wound I cannot tell, but ere I reached the end of our second day's march I was in all the raving delirium of a high fever. For nearly three weeks the days passed over my head without leaving any remembrance behind them; and when I recovered my senses I found myself reduced to infant weakness, and lying in a chamber which was evidently not the ward of an hospital, as my last recollections induced me to believe would be the case. It was a small neat room, cool and shady; and I found a nurse constantly by my bedside, while a surgeon visited me three times each day. At first I was much too feeble to ask any questions; but on the second or third morning after I began to recover, I begged the nurse to tell me where I was, when, to my surprise, I was told that I was in Tournay, and in the quarters of the Prince de Condé. The next day I was visited by several French officers who had accompanied his Highness into exile; and when I was well enough to sit up for a short time the Prince himself condescended to visit me, and remained with me alone for a full hour, making me tell him my whole history. The fate of Monsieur de Villardin, of which he had not yet heard, seemed to grieve him much; and when he left me he said, with one of those frank, brilliant smiles which sometimes illuminated a countenance that usually was more striking than prepossessing, "Well, well, De Juvigny, I will think of what I can do to serve you; and as hostilities are suspended, and a treaty of peace is under negotiation, I may have it more in my power to show you that I have not forgot *Vincennes* than I have yet had since we met there."

I trusted that it might be so, especially as I had candidly told the Prince my situation in regard to Mademoiselle de Villardin, only hoping, when I did so, to obtain my liberty more speedily. The news, however, that hostilities were suspended, and that peace was likely to be concluded, gave me the hope of soon holding my beloved Laura to my heart once more, as no pretext for separating us again would then exist. Having now shown my obedience to the monarch I served, and fully done my duty as a soldier, I determined to yield no more; and resolved, as a last resource, if any attempt should be made to reject my claim to Laura's hand, to beg her to unite her fate to mine without the consent of any monarch on the earth, and try our fate in my native land, where the prospects were now brightened by the death of the usurper.

From that day till I had completely recovered my health, I did not again see the Prince de Condé; and on enquiring for him when I was well enough to go out, I found that he was absent from Tournay, and not likely to come back for more than a week. These tidings vexed me a good deal, as I was now most anxious to return to France. No opposition, however, was made to my going out into the town, or even beyond the gates; and I found every facility of obtaining money amongst the merchants of the place. Thus I might at any time have effected my escape, had I been so inclined. But although my parole had never been even asked, the kindness which had been shown me by the Prince was a surer bond than links of iron; and I lingered on in Tournay with some degree of fretful impatience, but still gaining additional strength and health every hour. Had I known where to address a letter to his Highness, I certainly would have written to him; but he was moving from place to place, and even the French officers who remained in Tournay could not give me the necessary information. Thus passed nearly four weeks, and the world again began to assume the aspect of spring. It was now more than a year since I had seen Laura, and fully four months since I had heard from her or from Father Ferdinand; and there was a sort of dim uncertainty about the events which might have taken place in the interim that made my heart sometimes feel sick with apprehension.

At length, one night when I had returned *home*—as I called my little room in the Prince's quarters—more gloomy than ever, and was sitting by lamplight, consoling myself in the only way I could devise by writing to Laura for the third or fourth time since my recovery, I heard a good deal of bustle in the courts, and in about an hour afterwards, I was summoned to attend the Prince de Condé. Overjoyed at his return, I hurried to his presence, and found him quite alone. I believe the gladness of my heart sparkled out upon my countenance; for though there was a good deal of vexation and chagrin in his own face, yet he smiled when he saw me.

"You seem glad of my return, De Juvigny," he said, "but I am going to send you away from me directly. When I offered to set you free in Paris, in recompense for former services, or to reserve the consideration of them till another moment and put you to ransom, I did not think I should be so long ere I could do anything for you. Even now, all I can do is to make a messenger of you. However, the letter with which I am about to charge you may be worth the pains of carrying, if you know how to take advantage of it. The fact is, Spain and France are negotiating. Spain holds out on my account. The whole business annoys me. I fear not to be left to stand or fall by my own strength; and I do not wish to delay the arrangement of peace, so necessary to both countries, for any private interests of my own. I have consequently written this letter to Don Louis de Haro, the minister of his Catholic Majesty, beseeching him to put my personal affairs entirely on one side, while considering the far more important business of peace. No one more eagerly desires the conclusion of the negotiations than my royal cousin Louis of France; and to him I now send you, begging you to put this letter for Don Louis into the King's own hands, and request him, on my part, to make what use of it he will. The man who brings it to him, De Juvigny," he added, with a gay smile, "may well command the hand of the first heiress in France; and if I obtain for you, by this means, the woman that you love, I shall conceive that I have acquitted myself well towards you."

I need hardly say that my gratitude was deep and sincere, and after expressing it as well as I could, I received the Prince's farther directions; and the next morning mounted a horse I had bought in the city, and followed by four of the troopers of my own regiment—who had been taken in attempting to rescue me, and whom I had since found in Tournay—I set out for Paris, furnished with all the necessary passports. The poor fellows who accompanied me were delighted to find that the Prince had agreed to liberate them without exchange; and I need hardly say, that although I doubted not that difficulties and annoyances were still before me, my heart, too, beat more lightly than it had done for many a day. Thus we lost no time on the road, and as fast as our beasts would carry us made our way to Paris. It was after nightfall when we arrived, but without pause or hesitation I proceeded direct to the palace, and giving my name and quality to the attendants, I begged them to inform his Majesty and the Cardinal that I had intelligence of the utmost importance to communicate. The Cardinal, one of the pages informed me, had set out for the Spanish frontier some days before; but my message having been sent through all the proper channels to the King, I received, in reply, an order to present myself the next morning an hour before grand mass.

This was a disappointment, for I had fully calculated upon the news which I bore procuring me an immediate reception; but kings are so much accustomed to hear that their subjects have intelligence of importance to communicate, and to find that it refers to some petty interest or some private suit, that his Majesty fully believed my tidings to refer to my own affairs. The next morning I was at the Tuilleries at the exact moment; but much to my annoyance and disgust, I was kept in an ante-chamber till the bells for mass sounded all over the town, and remained there alone till the service of the church was over. More than a quarter of an hour passed, after I had learned that mass was done, seeing from the windows the people trotting home through the dirty streets, ere an attendant summoned me to the presence of the King. I was too much accustomed to various scenes, and had too frequently looked a sterner monarch in the face, to feel any agitation upon approaching any king upon earth; but in the interview that was about to take place, dearer interests than life itself were concerned; and when I thought of Laura, my heart certainly beat with a quicker pulse as I moved towards the royal presence.

After passing through several other apartments, the door of a cabinet was thrown open by the page, and immediately after I found myself before the young king, and in the midst of a circle which clearly showed me that my application for an audience had been supposed to refer to my personal concerns. On the King's right hand stood Monsieur de Turenne, and on his left the secretary Le Tellier. The Queen-mother also was present, together with several ladies, and one or two nuns, whose garb was certainly more harmonious with the cloister than the court; but on the Monarch's left appeared Father Ferdinand, the Count de Lorris, and the ancient friend of both my father and myself, the good old Earl of Norwich. One of Monsieur de Villardin's first cousins was there also, and his presence did not seem to augur well for my suit. A few of the officers of the court made up the group, and as I ran my eye over it in advancing, I was glad to find that the majority of those present were certainly inclined to support my pretensions. As the feelings of the King himself, however, were of far greater importance, I tried to gather from his countenance what was passing in his heart; and, accustomed as I had been from my early years to scan the faces of my fellow-men, I saw enough to give me some confidence. His brow was strongly contracted, it is true; and he fixed his eye upon me, as I entered, with an air of stern majesty which spoke anything but favour. At the same time, however, there was the least possible inclination towards a smile lurking about the corner of his mouth; and with this key to the rest, as I knew that I had done nothing to deserve severity, I judged that the stern frown upon his brow was too bitter to be entirely natural.

I advanced and kissed the hand he held out to me, and then drew a step back while he said, "Monsieur le Baron, you have desired an audience; and we are, in some degree, prepared for the business you have to speak of. Explain yourself, therefore, and doubt not that we shall do you justice."

I again advanced; and, well knowing that to forget the communication of the Prince de Condé, even for a moment, in my own hopes and fears, would be a subject of deep offence to the King, as well as the very worst policy in my own affairs, I bent my knee, and at once tendered his Highness's letter, saying, "Having had the good fortune, Sire, to be wounded and taken prisoner in your——"

"The good fortune, sir!" exclaimed the King. "Do you call being wounded and imprisoned good fortune?"

"It certainly is so, Sire," I answered, "when it is in the service of a prince who rewards all his servants far more than they deserve, and compensates, tenfold, everything that is suffered in his cause."

The King smiled, and bade me go on.—"Having, then, the good fortune, Sire," I continued, "to be wounded and taken prisoner in your Majesty's service, I fell into the power of his Highness the Prince de Condé, who, on setting me at liberty, charged me to deliver into your royal hand this letter, begging that you would be graciously pleased to make what use of it you, in your wisdom, shall think fit, to remove all difficulties from your gracious purpose of restoring peace to Europe."

The Queen-mother half rose from her chair, and Le Tellier took a step forward to receive, according to custom, the paper which I tendered to the King; but Louis took it himself at once, and opening the letter, which was not sealed, read the contents eagerly. "Indeed!" he cried, when he had concluded. "Indeed! Is he so generous? Then we must not suffer him to outdo us in generosity! Monsieur de Juvigny, the bringing us that letter from our noble cousin adds weight to your other services. Read, madam," he added, giving the paper to the Queen-mother; "read, and after having settled this other affair, we will take your Majesty's counsel as to what is to be done."

Anne of Austria read the letter attentively; and as the conclusion of a final peace with Spain was now her first desire, I could see her countenance beam with satisfaction as she saw that the only obstacle to the accomplishment of that wish was removed by the voluntary act of the Prince de Condé. When she had done she gave the letter to the Secretary, and at the same time bent a gracious smile upon me, saying, "You have indeed brought us news, young gentleman, well worthy of honour and reward!"

The King himself immediately proceeded, again assuming the somewhat stern air with which he had at first received me. "Monsieur le Baron de Juvigny," he said, "you have at different times highly distinguished yourself in our service; and Monsieur de Turenne here present gives the most favourable report of your military skill and qualities. All services rendered to ourselves we are certainly willing to recompense even more liberally than bare justice might require; but we understand that you aim at the hand of the first heiress in France—a match for a prince—an alliance which we should not scruple to seek for a member of our own family. This is estimating your claims somewhat too highly."

"Sire!" I replied, "it is not upon any small services I may have rendered to your Majesty, nor upon my long and undeviating attachment to the royal cause, before genius and wisdom had swept away the difficulties that surrounded it, nor upon some sufferings which I have endured in the course of my career, that I found my claim to the hand of Mademoiselle de Villardin. I found it upon her father's promise and her own; I found it upon her father's will, and upon his express application to your Majesty; and, more than all, I found it upon the deep attachment that exists between us. Both her guardians, one of whom is her nearest relative, consent to our union; and, indeed, they are bound to do so by the will of her father."

"But here, sir," said the King, "is her father's next of kin, who positively objects to her marriage with one, whose birth, for aught we know, may be very inferior."

"I appeal to that English nobleman, Sire," I replied, pointing to the Earl of Norwich, "who has known me from my birth, and who will answer for it, that the blood of my father and my mother was as pure as any in the realm of France, however poor we all might have become by the changes of this uncertain world."

"Ay, there is the fact!" answered Louis. "Ought I to bestow the hand of this great heiress upon one who may have much merit and even noble blood, but who sought these shores an absolute adventurer?"

The colour mounted into my face; and, although I had hitherto been as cautious as possible, some of my ancient abruptness broke forth, and I replied, "I have known princes begin their career as much adventurers as I was——!" From the King's eye I saw that all was lost if I did not mend my speech, and I added:—"I have seen princes begin their career as much adventurers as I was, who were destined to become the greatest monarchs on the earth."

The cloud was done away instantly, and a smile succeeded upon the countenance of the young King, while Monsieur de Turenne, who had bit his lip nearly through at the first part of my reply, drew a long breath, as if relieved by its conclusion.

"We do not doubt your merit, sir," answered his Majesty; "and as far as we ourselves are concerned, can, of course, have no objection to your union with this young lady, not designing her for anyone else. But the vast inequality of your fortunes, and the opposition of her father's nearest kinsman——"

"Which I beg most strenuously to urge," cried the cousin.

"Do not interrupt me, sir," said the King, sternly. "These two circumstances offer invincible obstacles to your immediate marriage unless you can show some motive for my disregarding the objection of this gentleman, and for believing that you are influenced by no interested motive whatever, in the attachment you declare yourself to feel towards this young lady."

I paused in order to be sure that the King had completely finished; but ere I could reply myself, Father Ferdinand advanced a little, and addressed the King. "I believe, Sire," he said, "that the first and strongest objection is, that a gentleman calling himself the nearest male relative of the late Duke de Villardin refuses his consent to the marriage of Monsieur de Juvigny with our ward Laura. That objection I can remove, by telling this gentleman that he is not the nearest male relative of the late Duke."

"Who, then, is?" demanded the other, fiercely.

"I am!" answered the priest, gazing sternly upon him. "I am Ferdinand de Villardin, the elder brother of the late Duke—he who, more than forty years ago, as you may have heard, young Sir, abjured the world—resigned his possessions and his rank—and, spreading abroad his own death, for twenty years buried himself in an Italian cloister. Of these facts, Sire," he added, turning to the King, "I have already given you satisfactory proof; and I now declare, that the full consent of her father's nearest of kin is given to Laura de Villardin's union with him who was more than a son to her late parent."

"And in regard to my attachment to her being disinterested, Sire," I added, "take from her all her possessions, and give me but herself—I ask no more."

"You think that it is impossible such a thing should happen, Monsieur de Juvigny," answered the monarch gravely; "and certainly it is impossible that we should strip our subjects of their property; but it is not at all impossible that another claimant to this young lady's lands may appear, and we tell you fairly that such is the case. Not four days ago it was clearly proved to us that Mademoiselle de Villardin has no claim whatever to one acre of her father's lands? What say you now?"

"They come not to me, my son," said Father Ferdinand, seeing my eyes turn towards him. "My claim upon them has been null for years."

"What say you now?" repeated the King, gazing upon me with an expectant smile.

"That most thankfully—as the greatest boon that your Majesty can bestow," I answered, "as a reward for all my services, and as a tie of gratitude towards you for ever—I claim the hand of Laura de Villardin; and only thank heaven that no inequality of fortune can now make anyone believe I seek her from aught but love."

A smile of majestic satisfaction beamed upon the countenance of the young monarch; but for several moments he continued to gaze upon me without uttering a word; and, of course, the same silence was preserved by everyone in the presence. "You have stood every trial well, Monsieur de Juvigny," said the King at length. "You have obeyed our commands at a moment when they were most difficult to obey. You have proved that your loyalty as a lover is no less perfect than your gallantry as a soldier; and all I shall regret, in signing your marriage contract, is that your bride will not bring you as noble a fortune as you once expected. My consent to your marriage is fully given; there is only the approbation of one other person to be asked. Monsieur de Lorris, be good enough to open that door. What say you, Madam? Do you consent likewise?"

As he spoke the King turned towards one of the nuns, who stood behind the Queen's chair, covered with the Ursuline veil. At the same moment Monsieur de Lorris opened a door which communicated with the great audience hall, and two more persons were instantly added to our party. They were Laura de Villardin, and, hand in hand, my little page Clement de la Marke, dressed in all the splendour of a high noble of those days, and entering with a step that seemed familiar with courtly halls.

Another sight, however, had riveted all my attention, and, I may say, had struck me dumb, for I actually stood in the midst of the circle like a statue, without life or motion, as the nun to whom the King had spoken, raising her veil, exposed to my sight features deeply engraved on the tablet of memory, and connected with many a sweet and many a terrible remembrance in the past. Pale and worn, but still beautiful—though more than twelve long years, loaded with grief, had passed over her head—it was Madame de Villardin herself that gazed upon me; and as I stood thunderstruck before her, she advanced and embraced me as her son. Clement de la Marke clung to me too; the whole truth flashed upon my mind; and, forgetful of all else but that Laura was mine and the dead alive again, I embraced them all in turn; while Anne of Austria wiped away a tear, and Louis turned with a smile of generous feeling to Turenne.

"Monsieur de Juvigny," said the King, as soon as my first joy was somewhat moderated, "forgive me for my *coup de théâtre*; but I wished to have my full share in your joy and your surprise. Though your fair bride has lost the rich lands of Villardin and Dumont, which go, of course, to my young Lord Duke here, yet she is still the heiress of Vermont and De Lorris; and her soft hand is worth a lordship in itself. Every detail has been already given to me; and as there are some painful points in the history of every family, these good lords here present must even smother their curiosity as best they may; for, by my command, the many explanations which you may require will be afforded to you by your dear friends in private. You had better now retire to the Hôtel De Villardin; and hereafter you will find that, as by your high qualities you have won yourself a beautiful bride, your services have not been rendered to an ungrateful master."

CHAPTER XLIII.

BEFORE I could well collect my senses, I was seated beside Laura de Villardin in the carriage of the good old Count de Lorris, with her young brother Clement looking playfully up in my face, which certainly must have expressed as much happiness as man could feel. On the other side appeared Madame de Villardin, with her uncle and her brother-in-law; and for a time a tumult of joyful feelings engrossed me entirely, as I looked round upon so many that I loved and esteemed, and found them all engaged in promoting my own dearest wishes. Another feeling, however, came to temper and to sadden; and I perceived that it was strong also in the bosom of everyone, as, gazing upon one another, each saw a number of beloved objects, but each felt that there was one wanting who could never return.

Strange to say, where there was so much to be asked and so much to be told, our drive passed absolutely in silence; and Madame de Villardin, when she once more entered the dwelling in which she had spent the days of her young pride and gaiety, drew down her veil and wept. At the foot of the staircase we passed Jacques Marlot, who bowed low and reverently; and when we reached the saloon Madame de Villardin again embraced me, saying, "God's blessing be upon you, my son, for all that you have done for me and mine. I will now leave you for a time, and our reverend brother here will give you all the details of many things that I have not spirits either to tell you myself or to hear told by another. Come with me, Laura, my beloved child; and you, Clement, betake you to your book; for the tale that your uncle is about to tell had better, in your case, be reserved for after years."

I could well have let my curiosity sleep till I had enjoyed the society of my dear Laura for some time longer; but Madame de Villardin seemed to think that the information I was to receive had better be given at once, and, of course, I did not oppose her.

Left alone with Father Ferdinand and Monsieur de Lorris, the good priest passed over his own history without explanation, and took up his story at the period when the bridge had given way beneath Monsieur and Madame de Villardin; and he gave me all the minute particulars of events, which I can here state but generally.

It had, luckily, so happened that a large mass of the wood-work had fallen at once beneath Madame de Villardin, and thus both broke her fall into the stream, and supported her as a sort of raft after she reached the water. She had called loudly for assistance; but, hurried rapidly round the point of land just below the bridge, her voice had not reached me as I swam, till after I had dragged out Monsieur de Villardin. The single cry which I did hear had, however, caught the ears of Jacques Marlot, who was at that moment returning from the farm of the good Ursulines; and, running down the shore, which was there less steep, he easily dragged Madame de Villardin, and the wood-work to which she was still clinging, to land. The house which he inhabited was close at hand, and thither he himself carried the lady, without waiting for other assistance. Madame de Villardin was quite sensible of everything around her when she arrived at his dwelling; but she had become deeply impressed with the idea that Monsieur de Villardin intended to destroy her and the child she carried in her bosom, and, acknowledging this apprehension in the terror of the moment, she besought Jacques Marlot and his wife to conceal her from pursuit. He on his part having been well accustomed, as libel-printer-general to the Fronde, to concealments of all kinds, instantly locked the door, in which state I afterwards found it, and took those measures which effectually prevented us from discovering the existence of Madame de Villardin, making his wife feign herself ill, to exclude all visitors from the house. Father Ferdinand, however, in whom Madame de Villardin had the fullest confidence, was made acquainted with the facts, under the strictest promise of secrecy; and, finding that the unhappy lady could never again look upon her husband without terror, he it was that advised her to seek a permanent resting-place in the Ursuline convent, of which she had been so munificent a benefactor.

There can be little doubt, however, that one more person became accidentally acquainted with the fate of Madame de Villardin; but she kept the secret far more nobly than might have been anticipated. That person was Suzette, who, after being dismissed from Dumont, lodged at St. Estienne, in the house of the very woman who attended Madame de Villardin in the premature birth of her son. The woman had been chosen from that village as a place in which Madame de Villardin never had been, and her name and station were carefully concealed from her; but still the whole arrangements had excited her surprise, and from the hints which Suzette had twice let fall in my presence, I could not doubt that she had gained sufficient information from her hostess, to feel sure of the existence of her former mistress. Our long absence from Dumont had given every opportunity of concluding all the subsequent arrangements without a chance of discovery. Madame de Villardin broke the last tie by leaving her child in the hands of Jacques Marlot at Juvigny, and retired from the world. The proximity of the convent, however, gave her frequent opportunities of seeing both her children without being known to them, and she gradually became quite reconciled to her situation. The great difficulty was in regard to the education of little Clement; but that was removed by my offer to take him as my page. The knowledge that he was near his father—and still more the tidings which she soon received that her husband was displaying towards his unknown child all the fondness of a parent—acted as balm to the wounded heart of Madame de Villardin; but still she could not banish the idea that, if the Duke ever became acquainted with the child's birth, he would seek its destruction; and nothing that Father Ferdinand could say, to show her his brother's deep grief and repentance for what had already occurred, served to relieve her mind in this respect. Nor, indeed, could one wonder that such were her feelings, after all the terrible proofs she had received of how far her husband's unjust suspicions might carry him. All that Father Ferdinand could obtain from her, was a permission to reveal to the Duke the facts, if ever he should see him on his deathbed; but her apprehensions still made her require that the tidings should not be given till there was no remaining chance of recovery.

Such is a general outline of the explanations given to me by Father Ferdinand in regard to the preservation of Madame de Villardin; but I was still anxious to hear more, and I asked him if Laura herself had been aware of her mother's existence?

"Certainly not," replied he; "she could not even have a suspicion of it till after that unhappy business of the Count de Laval; and here, my son," he added, "my own conduct requires some explanation. I had long seen your growing attachment to our dear Laura, and had spoken with Madame de Villardin upon the subject, consulting her as to the necessity of informing my brother of the evident result which would take place. From what we both knew of the natural generosity of his heart, we felt sure that he would not object to an union which, from our own regard towards you, we both desired; and it was, therefore, determined to let things take their course. When I found from little Clement the state of deep despondency into which you had fallen, now two years ago, and the rash acts to which that despondency led you, I began to suspect that you had become aware of your own feelings towards my niece, and looked upon them as hopeless. I therefore determined to give you some hope and encouragement, especially as I knew that Laura was not destined to become that wealthy heiress which you might suppose.

"Suddenly, however, my brother told me of his engagements with the Count; and, well aware of his rigid adherence to his word, I began to fear that your passion was without hope indeed. After you were gone from the château, and the Count had arrived, poor Laura confided to me her misery; and told me that she would rather, at once, take the veil than wed another than yourself. As I knew her father would not himself even display a thought of drawing back from his promise, I advised her to see the Count himself, and to tell him the true state of her feelings; and then—as I had reason to believe that the Count's passion was more for the heiress than the woman—I told Laura, that a great probability existed of her father's estate passing to another; and, though I desired her to ask no further, I believe that, from the terms in which I spoke, some suspicion of the truth crossed her mind. I bade her, as a last resource, give a hint of such a result to the Count himself, if her other representations did not move him; and then to refer him to me. She did not rest satisfied with the first, however; but after having told him plainly that she could not love him, as she loved another, she used her last resource also; although she acknowledges that he seemed much moved by her first representation. I am sorry that she did so, for now it is not very possible to tell by what motives the Count was actuated; and I would fain have given him an opportunity of doing honour to his own heart. However, he spoke with me afterwards; and, knowing him to be a man upon whose promised secrecy I could fully rely, I told him boldly that there was not only a chance, but a certainty—as far as earthly things ever can be certain—of the estates of Monsieur de Villardin passing away from Laura. He asked an explanation; and, seeing that it might save our dear girl from misery, I told him that, if I could obtain permission, I would satisfy him of the fact.—He agreed to wait four days for my communication, promising that, if I proved my statement, he would voluntarily withdraw his claim. In consequence of this arrangement, I immediately wrote to Madame de Villardin and, showing her that her child's happiness was at stake, demanded her leave to make the Count acquainted with so much of her story as necessary to prove to him that Laura would never possess the estates which he expected to receive for her. She immediately consented, and the result you know. As a matter of course, all the facts of Madame de Villardin's history were communicated by myself and Monsieur de Lorris to the King some time ago; and as her presence was necessary to establish the rights of her son to his father's honours and estates, his Majesty gave the necessary commands for removing all impediments which conventual rules might oppose to her visiting the court. Both the young King himself and his mother took the greatest interest in the fate of all concerned; and, as by your letters we received intelligence of your situation, and your restoration to health, his Majesty declared that as soon as your exchange could be effected, he would only subject you to one more trial ere he gave you your fair bride. All opposition on the part of his Eminence of Mazarine was withdrawn, as soon as he found that two-thirds of Laura's estates were diverted to her brother; and yesterday morning, early, a summons to attend the King and Queen gave us also the joyful news of your return. The parts that we were all to play were laid down by the King himself; and our poor cousin, who had come up some months ago to claim the guardianship of the young heiress, was brought in also, still in perfect ignorance of all the facts. I now need tell you no more; and if a light step I heard but now be a true signal, I think you will find someone in that next boudoir, who, though scarcely more happy to see you than myself, is a fitter companion for a young soldier than an old priest can be."

As I, too, heard Laura's step, I asked no more questions at that time; but, joining her that I loved, spent an hour or two of as unalloyed happiness as ever fell to the share of mortal man. But a short space now intervened ere we were united for ever; and although all that we had gone through rendered me constantly apprehensive of some new disappointment until Laura was at length clasped to my heart, my own beloved wife, yet, since our fate has been placed beyond all further doubt, I am inclined to believe that the dangers, and the difficulties, and even the sorrows, of our early years, contribute greatly to our present happiness.

We have a store of thoughts and remembrances in the past, which forms for us a world separated from the rest of the world: many things endured for the sake of each other, mingle, I may say, a feeling of mutual gratitude with mutual affection: the deep impression of extraordinary events keeps the first fresh feelings of the passion that was born amongst them in all its original fire, although years have passed since our fate was united. Even the memory of the beloved dead forms an inseparable tie between our hearts which can never be weakened; and when I look into my Laura's eyes, I see the same love beaming in them as my wife, which lighted them in infancy and girlhood, only augmented with a thousand sweeter and brighter beams, by every stage through which our affection has passed.

My tale is now concluded up to this hour; and so contented am I with my present state, that I trust to have nothing more which could prove of interest to anyone to add to these pages, till time lays me in the grave. Almost all whom I have mentioned are still living; and though Madame de Villardin has again sought the quiet seclusion of the cloister, we frequently enjoy her society as far as her situation will permit. Father Ferdinand has often promised to give me a sketch of his early history; but it would seem that there are in it points so painful, as even to have defied the softening power of time, and to remain too acute to bear recapitulation. Clement de Villardin has become the gallant soldier, whose name is known to everyone both in England and France; and I have laid by the sword which so early came into my hands, hoping that fate has exhausted her store, and that no more changes, either of station or of character, may yet be reserved for JOHN MARSTON HALL.

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